

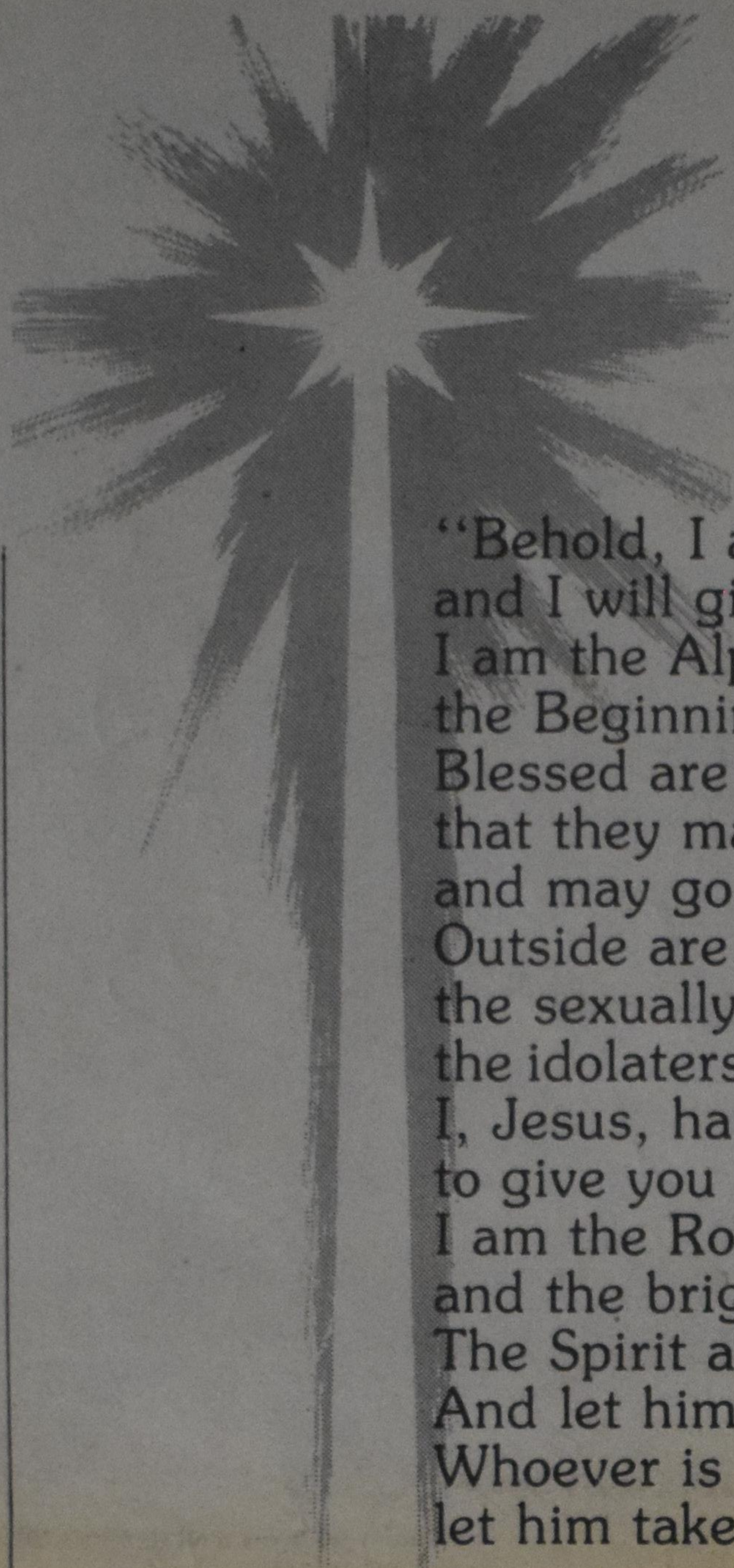
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CALVINIST CONTACT

1977 CHRISTMAS ISSUE





“Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me,
and I will give to everyone according to what he has done.
I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last,
the Beginning and the End.
Blessed are those who wash their robes,
that they may have the right to the tree of life
and may go through the gates into the city.
Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts,
the sexually immoral, the murderers,
the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.
I, Jesus, have sent my angel
to give you this testimony for the churches.
I am the Root and the Offspring of David,
and the bright Morning Star.”
The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!”
And let him who hears say, “Come!”
Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes,
let him take the free gift of the water of life.

Revelation 22:12-17

The cover story

A MEDITATION ON CHRISTMAS

The more we think about the first Christmas, the story of Jesus' birth, the more amazing it becomes. When Jesus was born in the stable of Bethlehem, centuries of speculation were over. Prophecy was fulfilled. It had finally happened. Immanuel had come. God with us, then, and now. Yesterday, today and forever.

God's son became one of us to reveal God's plan of reconciliation, to close the gap that had separated man from God. He took on our form and by doing that he changed the destiny of the world.

Jesus' birth signalled a new day in an otherwise hopeless situation. The miracle of Bethlehem was exactly like Isaiah had foretold. It was like a breath of fresh air, a "new shoot of growth" from a seemingly dead tree, new growth from dry ground.

Sometimes we over-react at Christmas, and try to push the stable, Jesus' Jewish parents, the shepherds and the

animals in the background. They remind us too much of the plastic manger scenes around town.

Our Lord is divine, holy and eternal, we say. He is the Lord of the universe, the all-powerful mighty one. And we push aside the idea that he became like us, that he was born just like us, that he needed to be fed and his diapers changed, that he needed the love, affection and security of a family to *make* it in a hostile world.

And still, and that's the amazing part of the story, he was indeed the God-man. His birth was the incarnation of God in human form and his birth foreshadowed the new birth in each one of us, his followers.

When we celebrate Christmas, we can also sing "happy birthday" to ourselves. Without his birth, *our* new birth, that "other" divine interference couldn't possibly have happened. God's Spirit wouldn't have come to live with us and renew our lives.

There's a gem of a Christmas song in Peter's first letter. It deserves to be put to music and sung as a doxology at the end of our Christmas church service:

"Praised be the God and Father
of our Lord Jesus Christ,
he who in his great mercy
gave us new birth;
a birth unto hope which draws its
life from the resurrection of Jesus
Christ from the dead;
a birth to an inperishable inheri-
tance, incapable of fading or
defilement, which is kept in
heaven for you...
a birth to a salvation which stands
ready to be revealed in the last
days." 1 Peter 1:3-5(NAB)

This new birth is channeled through us to reach the ends of the world. And it will remain with us when all prophecies are fulfilled, when in the new world, the lion and the lamb, the

child and the snake will indeed play together.

The miracle of Christ's presence in our lives is also a source of amazement in this Dutch children's hymn:

"Maakt gij Heer, zo groot, zo rein
in mijn hart uw woning?
Is dat hart niet veel te klein
voor zo'n grote koning?
Staat het in uw heilig woord
waarlijk zo te lezen?
Heeft mijn oor dat goed gehoord,
zal dat moog'lijk wezen?"

There's no way we can ignore Christmas. It is truly a holy day worth celebrating as an historical event which turned the world "right side up." But it's worth celebrating *only* if we have been touched by the Child of Bethlehem, Immanuel.

John Knight

The puppet on the blackboard

Lee Wilson walked briskly along the long corridor, her high-heeled shoes click-clacking on the linoleum. It sounded hollow in the empty school. She was very early this morning, even earlier than normal. But she wanted to hang up some pictures of birds which she had taken from her Audubon album to show the class.

Next week she was taking the class on a nature trail and she wanted to prepare them for this "educational experience" as these trips were invariably called on the note to the parents. Well, why not? It was educational, at least she could say so much for her class. No fooling around for her kids in the great outdoors during school time. They studied. She made sure of that.

She wasn't so sure she could say that much about Mildred's class. Not one of her children carried a clipboard when they left for one of their outings, but she had seen balls and even skipping ropes. Imagine! This was indication enough what kind of teacher Mildred was. The kids loved her, of course. No drill, poor discipline and lots of singing every day. But learning in the real sense of the word, forget it! Every year, when Mildred's grade fivers moved to her grade, she could start all over with the tables of multiplication, grammar, reading skills and what not. Before she actually could start teaching grade six work, almost two months had passed.

It wasn't fair. It just wasn't fair. She had to work double hard to bring them on the required level and even then many kids remained under-achievers, not because they weren't bright, but only because they had never been taught to study and to concentrate; they had never been made aware how much joy and challenge the gaining of knowledge gives. If people only realized how many treasures were hidden between the pages of books, they would encourage their children to read instead of allowing them to watch those horror movies and violence on T.V.

Lee had reached her classroom and opened the door. Then she stopped and stood stunned. Her eyes swept over the room in one big engulfing glance. She leaned against the doorpost and closed her eyes. Without realizing, her precious bird pictures dropped on the ground.

"No," she said to herself, "it can't be true...I must be dreaming...hallucinating things..." She opened her eyes again. It was as if one of the horror movies of television had become a reality right in front of her eyes. All the desks in her room were overturned, some thrown on top of each other. Her own desk was broken and bent. The whole room was in chaos. Flowerpots were shoved off the windowsill and broken flowers, earth and pieces of pots and jars were scattered on the floor. Her beautiful, cultivated and carefully tended hibiscus, the pride and love of the whole class was purposely trampled upon and the three huge pink buds were grinded to pulp.

Slowly, trying to take in all the details of the ravaged room, Lee walked through the mess. The contents of the wall closets were spilled over the floor. Books, maps, notebooks, boxes with pens and pencils, paper clips, chalk, products of paper, clay and cardboard made in art class, were smashed, torn, ripped and broken. The big poster - which she had

made herself and on which she had spent many hours of her own time - listing first in groups and later alphabetically the most well-known birds of Canada and which had been such a colourful, eye-catching wall decoration of which she had been quite proud, was torn off the wall and into scraps.

Lee clenched her fists. A blind, uncontrolled anger was soaring within her. Her eyes narrowed to small slits, her mouth was set in one hard line with the lips tightly pressed together and the nails of her clenched fists dug

A short story
by
Ineke Parlevliet

into her hands with such a force that they left marks. For a few moments Lee was struggling with the desire to finish off the room in her hot fury, to smash the windows, pull the drapes down, scatter the fluorescent lights to a million pieces and kick the walls down.

But then she got hold of herself. Don't be stupid, she told herself. Losing self-control is immature, childish. An educated person is above that. Blow off the roof now, and you have lost. Deal with it constructively. Be in charge. On top. Find out who did it and give it to him. Show now that you are undaunted, able to handle this affair with control and detachment. Don't get involved emotionally. Keep your cool. Be collected. Now is the time to show the children, and not only the children, but the staff as well, that education means self-control, maturity.

Lee straightened her shoulders, she unclasped her hands and rubbed them together to allow the blood to flow through her fingers. She picked up her Audubon pictures and set her face in a forced, false position of relaxation. Her heart was still in turmoil and a persistent voice repeated deep-down monotonously: Whoever did this, will get it...

"What's the matter with you, Lee? You're standing there like a flagpole. Good grief!! What happened here? Oh, no...!!!"

Lee, standing halfway in the room, turned around. Her voice was cold and calm when she answered, "Somebody ran amok, I guess, and tried to demolish the place. Whoever it was, he pretty well succeeded."

Mildred entered the room and walked through the debris as a headless chicken, exclaiming in a high-pitched voice how shocked she was. "Those poor flowers...and the books! What a mess! How do they dare! Look, those brand new atlases!

And that ink over your shelves! You never get that off anymore...Any idea who's done it, Lee?"

Lee looked at Mildred with a glint of contempt in her eyes. The nut. Just look at her, moaning and groaning and picking up pieces of pottery and paper like a chicken picks up corn. She indeed looks like a chicken with her short, fat neck and formless mass of body. The same protruding stomach. And then those skinny, stiltlike legs with long, pointed shoes under that volume of mass and fat. You can be overweight. All right! But that doesn't mean that you have to look like a barrel of beer.

"No," she said, "I have no idea who did it. Funny perhaps, but I wasn't around when it happened and I'm pretty sure nobody else was either."

Mildred looked up, not sure whether Lee was sarcastic or not. You never knew with that well polished face and those cool, observing eyes, which seldom portrayed warmth and affection. Interest, yes. Perhaps too much so, or at least a show of interest for the wrong reasons. A walking encyclopedia, always knowing an answer and often the right answer, too. That was the miserable thing about it. And if she did not know it, she would find out. Her mind would not give up until her thirst for education was at least temporarily satisfied. Lee, Lee Wilson, the perfect teacher, the good-looking, well-dressed, slim woman, always composed, collected, cool. She could not stand her. She knew too, that this feeling was mutual. She was sarcastic, of course, Mildred decided. Suddenly she felt stupid and defeated. She was no match for the intelligent, haughty woman who was with her in the room.



"Well, I thought you were such a smart girl. It's obvious, isn't it? Some kid vented his anger at you by damaging your room."

"Too bad you weren't there," Mildred said, keeping her voice light. "But I don't think that it really matters. It must be some one who really hates you and even I can hardly believe that all children hate you." She stressed the word "all" and it stood out like a traffic sign in the flow of her sentences.

"Hate me?" For a moment Lee was taken aback. "What do you mean by that?"

"You're crazy. This has nothing to do with me! My kids like me, the one more than the other, but certainly not one of my children would get it into his

head to do this. They respect me too much. Some kid, most likely not even one from our own school, must have entered the school illegally and went to work. It's just pure vandalism. Perhaps he or they - who knows how many were there - were high on dope or liquor. Whoever did it, he is not a student of my grade. I'm positive about that!"

"If I were you, I wouldn't say that too loud, Lee. The evidence is there that you are wrong this time. Quite wrong."

Lee frowned. "I don't know what you are talking about, Mildred."

"No, you apparently don't. Just turn around, Lee and look at the blackboard. That might smarten you up."

With a jerk Lee turned around. She had looked at the blackboards before. They were covered with big smears of chalk, wild, crooked circles and scrawls of different colours, which made them look like gigantic psychedelic paintings. But not one word was written on the boards. Nobody had revealed his handwriting. Or theirs. Or hers.

Lee walked closer to the boards. She squinted her eyes. She was near-sighted, but hated to wear glasses. She had tried contact lenses, but she did not feel comfortable with them. Besides, she got by quite well without glasses. It was just in church and in a cinema that she couldn't do without. Then the distance to the speaker or picture was too great.

"Here, look here," Mildred said sweetly and helpful. "It doesn't reveal much about the culprit's identity, but it certainly does say a lot to whom this mess was directed."

In the left hand corner of the middle blackboard was a small drawing of a person.

"I'm sure you must recognize yourself," Mildred said again. The venom in her voice was unmistakable.

Lee brought her head closer. The little puppet did not pose any question marks. The drawing was far from artistic and certainly not expertly done, but the dangling earrings, the books under the arm and the high bun of hair on the head identified Lee Wilson more than her own signature. She always wore her hair that way and had these earrings, too, in order to give her small 5 foot 3 inch frame a taller appearance. And who had ever seen her without carrying books or pictures or maps?

The blow which the little puppet gave her was more direct than the sudden hit of the up-side down room. For the first time that she could remember, she was lost for words. She heard Mildred's voice, "It must be someone who really hates you..." No, that was not possible. None of her children hated her. She was such a good teacher. The best the school ever had. James himself had said so and with his seniority and experience as principal it must be true. No, it was not possible. Nobody hated her. There must be a mistake. Somewhere! Somehow!

Mildred observed Lee with intense interest. She saw how a look of hurt, unbelief and shock swept over her face and for a few short moments Lee's face looked naked, empty, deprived of its collected calm. Vulnerable. Hurt. Mildred turned around.

"I'd better call James," she said. She had had her victory, but it made her feel dirty. I am a slob, she thought. Not only on the outside, but inside as

The puppet on the blackboard

well. Lee is right. She suddenly felt depressed and rotten.

The bell rang before Mildred had been able to locate James Finch. When he finally came, Lee had already organized her class in working units and as little busy ants the boys and girls were active in cleaning up the room. Lee was herself again. Get busy, she had told herself. Don't be humiliated by a stupid little puppet in a corner of a blackboard. She quickly erased it with the back of her pullover sleeve. Act normally. Be in charge. When James came in and saw what was happening, he ordered the children to stop immediately.

"Go to the gym," he told them. "Play basketball. And behave. The one out of line is in trouble. The police has to see this first."

The police! A simultaneous "ohh" escaped the class and deeply impressed they left the room.

"Too bad you let the kids in the room, Lee," James said and there was reproach in his voice. "It will be impossible now for the police to find any special fingerprints. In this way the only possible clue to find the culprit has been destroyed."

"I'm so sorry...I didn't think about that, James. I was so upset about the room..." It was a lame excuse and Lee knew it.

"Well, the damage is done, literally and figuratively. I doubt that we ever find out who did it... Too bad. I realize that you were in some state of shock, but still from you I had expected more common sense."

Suddenly tears sprang to Lee's eyes. This hit was as direct as Mildred's. With force she choked her tears back. No one was going to see her cry. Never.

"It was stupid," she said. "I really goofed that one up. But I can make you one promise: I will not rest until I have found the culprit."

"I hope you will," James said. "Not so much for your sake as for his, or hers."

The police came and all the children were interrogated without getting anywhere. No windows were broken. No hidden entrance to the school discovered. The teachers were questioned. The janitor. No one could throw any light upon the sad case of affairs. Lee had expected Mildred to blab about the little puppet in the corner of the blackboard, but for some unexplained reason she had kept her mouth shut. So had Lee. If somebody hated her, it was her business; nobody else's.

Theories were given and rejected. Notes and names were scribbled on the pads of the two police officers, but that was as far as they could go. No use to go after fingerprints. Vandalism was nothing new today. Anybody could've done it. It could've been teen-agers from the high school down the road. Or dropouts. Or a dope addict. Who knows today? And so the police had left. The case was closed. No use to spend much time and energy on it. The room was cleaned up. Broken desks were replaced, books were straightened out and glued back together if possible; maps were taped up and Lee made a new bird poster, less colourful and less eye-catching. The children took new plants to school and Lee bought another hibiscus. It had no buds. A few days later the room resembled itself again. Only the ink stains in the wall-closet remained. Life returned to normal.

During the first few days, the damage done to Lee's room was the main topic of the staff's conversation during the coffee breaks and lunch hour. Everybody was still wracking his brains as how the culprit could've

entered the school after closing time. The janitor had locked the doors the night before like he always did. He was sure about that and there was no other way to be found how someone could've gained entrance to the school.

During one of these conversations, Lee said, "No matter what, I shall find out who did it."

"I don't give you much chance," one of the other teachers remarked. "It's impossible to find a needle in a haystack."

Lee didn't answer, but glanced quickly at Mildred, and caught her

"The idea that one of her own students hated her was totally unacceptable. Yet it was true."

eyes. A spark of understanding lit up between them for one brief moment. They both knew that the needle could be found, since it was only a matter of searching among 28 straws. To Lee's immense relief Mildred remained quiet and Lee felt uneasy about it. Why didn't Mildred mention the little puppet? She could hardly believe that she did it to spare her.

"Let's hope that Lee will succeed in her efforts to find the child who did this awful thing," James said. His voice was serious. "Whoever did it, is a very sick child, who is crying for help."

The weeks went by. The damage to Room 6 was no longer mentioned among the staff and children. Other topics of interest took its place. Thanksgiving, Halloween, the Science Fair, and the fast approach of winter. Already Christmas was being looked forward to, although it was still many weeks away.

Lee did her work as usual. Faithfully she prepared her lessons and tried to make them as interesting as possible. If she did not instill a thirst for knowledge in the children now, when they still could be influenced, it might be too late forever. High school students were often so set in their minds and ideas that it could be very hard to get through to them. She knew this too well from her own high school years.

Grade school, that's where the well for the gaining of knowledge should be dug. This was the reason why she preferred to teach the grade school children. She had enough qualifications to teach high school. She had majored in English, history and French. Quite an achievement, really. After her divorce from Rob she had gone back to school to do French. The marriage had only lasted three years and they had had no children. She certainly had not wanted them either, but accidents do happen. She had always had the faint suspicion that Rob wouldn't have minded if she had become pregnant, although he was certainly just as happy as she was with their double income. Lee had made it clear before their marriage that before everything else she first wanted to pursue a career in teaching. At least for quite a number of years. It would

be silly not to make use of her degrees. Of course, even without teaching her education had meaning. For herself. Wasn't it George Orwell who had said in '1984' that 'Knowledge is power'? No, it couldn't be him. His slogan was the opposite... Was it? She'd better look it up. Stupid that she could forget something like that!

Yet she always wanted to teach. She had so much to give. She was a good teacher. She had been told she was and she knew it herself. There was nothing wrong with acknowledging your own talents. It was hypocrisy and false humility if you did not. Besides, good teachers were born, not made. It was a gift from God. So why not accept it with grace and work with it?

Her marriage had gone on the rocks. True. For a while she had had a guilty feeling. Was it because of her teaching career? With honesty she had scrutinized and analyzed their marriage problem, but she had come to the conclusion that it was not because she had been working. It couldn't be either. Rob had never objected. On the contrary. He had never shown much interest in her work, but then, this was visa versa.

What did she know about car sales? She was happy for him if his company had made some good sales, but how long could you talk about cars? A car was only a necessity. You could not do without it. As long as she had a car that took her where she had to go, that was fine with her. After all it was only an object of value in the materialistic sense. That some people, women too, could be so car crazy to spend so much interest, money and time on it, was beyond her. Rob was one of those people. Perhaps that gave a clue to the



breakdown of their marriage. The funny part was that it was very difficult to put a finger on the exact place of the failure. They had liked and loved each other, but somewhere along the line things didn't work out as they had expected. They had been wise to part without wasting more unhappy years together. They were still friends, although she saw less of him now that he had recently remarried. She had no plans to marry again. She didn't think she ever would. Of course, in the beginning she had felt quite lonely without Rob. She had to learn to adjust to a single life again. To come home to an empty apartment, to wake up and not to smell Rob's first cigarette, to cook for just one person, and to go to a concert without escort. But she had adjusted. She had made herself. The French course had helped her and soon she had found out that the world was full of friends, male, too. She often had dates, but nothing serious. She was frank enough to tell them that. They accepted that. After all, she was a good looking woman and decorative enough at a dinner table!

Above all she was free now. No little guilt pangs anymore about being away

at night for educational meetings or conferences or about spending money on expensive study books, while what she really needed was a dishwasher, which she had promised Rob to buy. He hated doing dishes, but it was only fair that he helped her with the household chores. After all she was even more busy with her schoolwork for the next day than he was at night. And when he had started to join a bridge club at night - a game she refused to learn; all games were childish in her opinion - she thought that was an excellent solution. Yet somehow they had drifted more apart.

Well, that was all over now. She was happy, enjoyed her work, had friends galore and sufficient money to get by. She could make more if she took a teaching job at a high school, but she wasn't after materialistic things. Many of her colleagues were. The majority of the married women who taught school did it for the financial reward. She was different. Money was only a necessity, like a car, but not a goal in itself. She was a teacher for knowledge's sake. That must be the reason why she was such a good one, she had concluded. She was genuine. Not a phony.

But since her room had been turned upside down, Lee didn't feel as secure anymore as she had before. She was still extremely angry about this act of vandalism and although everyone had long given up on the offender, she had not. She did not talk about it with the staff. Only once when one of the teachers had asked her kiddingly when she was going to solve the mystery, she had answered: "Just give me time."

Time was going by now, and she still had not advanced much beyond the puppet on the blackboard. Often when her students were bowed down over their books, she looked at the bent heads. One of those had concocted the crime... Again and again she heard Mildred's almost triumphant voice, "It must be someone who really hates you..." The knowledge that one of these boys and girls who were now so deeply involved in their schoolwork, hated her so much that he or she had taken the enormous risk of getting exposed as a juvenile criminal, was eating her. Some one hated her... Her, the best teacher for miles around!

Not one of her colleagues could keep the class as spellbound as she when she taught history or biology. No other one had so much patience with the slow learners as she had. One of her profs had once told them, "You don't have to be a good teacher to teach bright and eager-to-learn children. They'll learn even with a poor one. But the test for your teaching abilities lies in teaching the slow and not interested ones."

She had taken this to heart. It had become her challenge. And she was booking results. More than once the other teachers came with a problem child. "I just can't make Johnny understand how to do these math questions. Please, will you try?"

Of course. Here lay her challenge! She followed a simple method. Let him work on his own; then find out if he just put an answer down by guessing or that he indeed made a calculation. If that was so, she would do everything in her power to follow the child's reasoning and if she did she knew exactly where his problem was, and could show it to him. In nine out of ten cases it worked and the happy smile of the child and teacher was sufficient reward for her extra time involved after school.

The whole idea that one child of the more than 300 children at school hated her, was already absurd, but that one of her own students hated her was totally unexceptionable. Yet it was true.

*Amidst a confused world,
Amidst growing anarchy,
Amidst many who lose their faith,
We kneel before Thee*

*Seeing Thy great compassion,
Seeing Thy marvellous love,
Seeing Thy renewing grace,
We adore Thee.*

*Use as a mirror of Thy love,
Use as a herald of Thy coming,
Use us as faithful servants,
We pray Thee.*

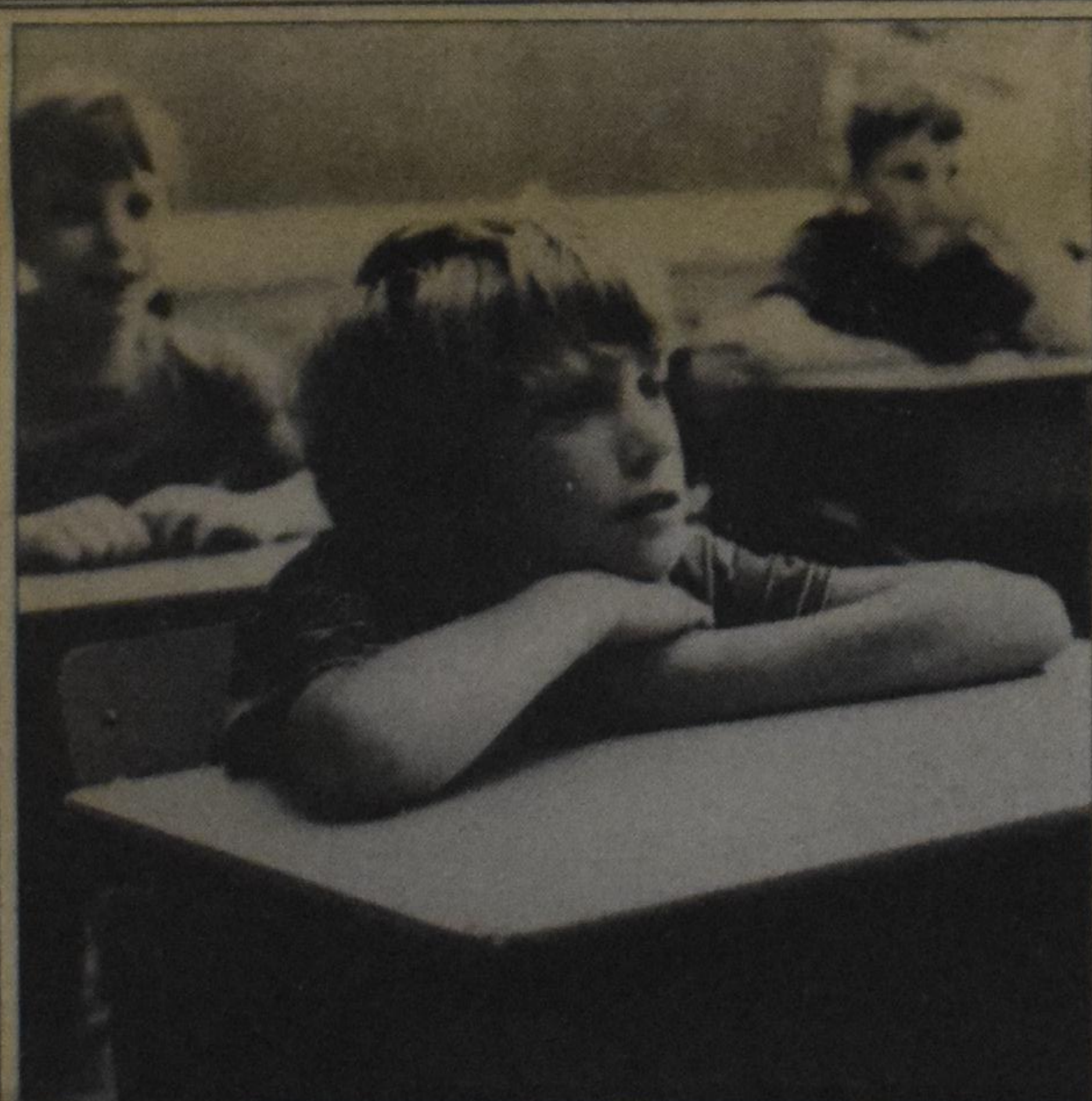
*Use us as a herald of Thy coming,
Use us as a mirror of Thy love,*

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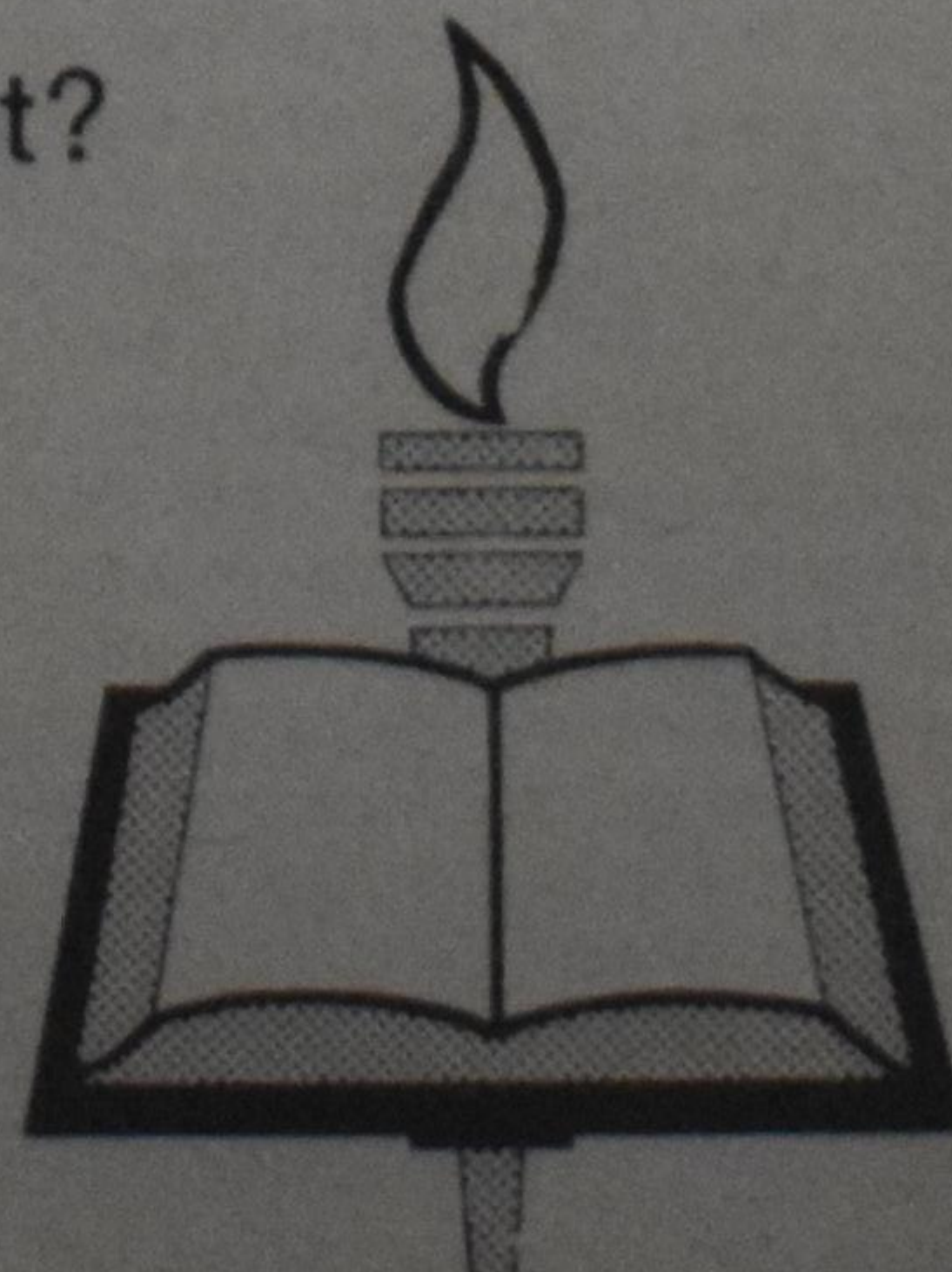
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The puppet on the blackboard

The little puppet on the blackboard spoke a clear language. The puppet had been erased, but it was still etched on her mind and heart. And it hurt. If she only knew who it was who was causing her all this anger, heart ache and frustration! If she only could lay her hands on this child who deprived her every new day and new night of her feeling of security and confidence! She would make sure that he or she would bleed for it.

James might say that the child was sick, so what! Even if the kid did have some kind of a hang-up, that did not give him the right to start wrecking classrooms! That was the trouble today with the role psychology played in education. Of course, psychology was important, very important. She realized that. Yet it was not the last word! If everything and all human behavior was indeed so tied up with past experiences during childhood or whatever, then as an educator you had no leg to stand on any more. Blame the past and all sense of responsibility went down the drain. Wasn't this what education basically is all about: To work towards maturity and then with the gained sense of responsibility use all the talents and brains and time you had for God's service? That was the Biblical approach. And she stuck by it. The child was responsible. Sick or not. What did that matter? Somebody hated her... But who? Who?

The more weeks passed by, the more agonizing the question became. Gradually the question "who?" became an obsession. First at random, but then more organized Lee began to observe her students. While doing so she made the strange discovery that she really didn't know a thing about them! Sure, she knew how they worked, how much interest and diligence was involved. She knew how they wrote; she only had to see one written letter to identify the writer of it. She could predict which type of question certain children would ask and who would try to prompt or cheat. Even blindfolded she could tell quite accurately what kind of lunch the lunch eaters were carrying in their pails or bags. She knew everything about them that was related to school, but for the rest... nothing.

It was a kind of shock to Lee when she had to face this conclusion. She tried very hard to justify this. She was a school teacher, not a nanny. Her job was to teach children to learn and to help them along on the road of knowledge. Their home life, family relationship, emotional needs or physical handicaps and what not, had nothing to do with her job as a teacher. There were of course teachers — and Mildred was one of them — who often deviated from their set course and goal, and who did get involved with the children, or with some of them. Mildred was forever drying tears with her dirty hanky or hugging children who took her a bouquet of dandelions! She always made a big fuss, too, when one of her children had a birthday. It was not the child who then treated the whole class, but Mildred herself who took homemade cookies or fudge to school. Mildred didn't look like a barrel for nothing! Yet this was pure bribery, as far as she could see. Once Mildred had taken one of her kids to a store to buy her winter boots! The ideal! Those large families did get Family Allowance. Right? Where did that money go? She had had quite an argument with Mildred about that with the only result that the animosity between them had become open hostility.

Mildred. Lee had always felt superior to her, on top of her. In fact she despised Mildred with all her heart.

However, since the puppet on the blackboard affair, she had started to feel ill at ease in Mildred's presence. Mildred knew too much... Yet she had not blabbed. Why not? What was she up to? She didn't trust her for one penny. Lately she tried to avoid Mildred as much as possible. Just to play it safe.

"Someone must really hate you..." Lee heard the echo of Mildred's words resounding in the empty school after four; the same words woke her up from a restless sleep and jumped in front of her when a traffic light changed to red. Who did it? Where was the answer?

Once Lee had been told that she had a methodical way of thinking. It certainly was an asset. She tried to fit the shoes of the culprit. A child of ten, eleven years old with such a crime and secret on his mind, must show the tension inside in one way or the other. His school work must suffer. His attention span easily interrupted; his feeling of being at ease jeopardized... There must be strength in the child, enough strength to kick her desk into pieces. A girl couldn't as easily do that. Unless it was Louisa; she was husky and strong as a horse. But Louisa was as dull and placid as a pot of porridge. She certainly missed the imagination and the guts to wreck a place. Ellen was too nervous. She was already close to tears when she scored an 80 instead of a 90 or 100! Janet was too frail. Nell too much a lady. Willy too dumb...

Lee went over the girls and the more she did so, the more she believed that she had to search among the sixteen straws of boys to solve the nagging, frustrating problem of who hated her. Someone in her class was a Judas.



Someone with a smooth, polished face was a traitor in her class. Who was it?

Lee started to compare marks. Billie had gone down a bit lately, Norman was doing the same as ever, a steady, regular worker; Don was doing quite well, so was Jack. Tom did well in September, then went down and was getting upwards again now as Christmas came closer. Somehow his Christmas report was related to his Christmas present, Mildred had told her at the beginning of the new school year. Was it Dick? Ron? Peter? Who?? Lenny perhaps? He was a kind of a loner, a dreamer going his own way. He never posed any behaviour problems, yet often he just wasn't "there" when his mind was wandering off. What was going on in his mind? What did she know about it? His grades were barely average. She had tried with a Job's patience to get him more activated, more interested in his school work, for he was bright enough, but somehow she could never reach him. Was he the one because she "bugged" him all the time, as he had told her once? Who was it? "There must be somebody who hates you..." Who?

It could not be Rick. He was new; he had come from another school in town, and had only been attending her classes for a good month when the damage had been done. He was a good student, never needed coaching and they never had exchanged one bad word. Not Rick. She had known all the other children since grade four, as the curriculum of the school was given on a semi-rotating teaching system. She was the French and history teacher for the upper grades.

Was it Ralph? Ralph... It could be... The show-off, the big-mouth... A

"She stayed at school after four. This was her real battlefield. She was dealing with a concrete case of truth and honesty."

rather aggressive kind of kid, easily angry, easily offended, but always teasing or pestering others... Yet not a bad child. They got along quite well, especially since the time that she had given him some constructive hints as how to go about his science project, which later won a honourable mention at the city's Science Fair. He had been so happy and had thanked her several times for her suggestions. Had this just been a front? Was he as sincere as he had sounded? Or wasn't he? The Science Fair of course had taken place after the damage done to her room... Could a child be so double faced?

Lee sighed. What did she really know about her class? Nothing! Nothing! It was maddening... Couldn't she trust anyone anymore? What a mess! It haunted her day and night. She knew herself how she was changing. Her confidence was gone; she was easy irritated, lost her temper on several occasions, which she had never done before. The restless nights of sleep didn't help either. Even the sleeping pills provided no relief. It always gave her a headache the next morning, as if her head was made of cement. Heavy, dull, pressing. It took away her appetite. In fact only the thought about food was often nauseating. She was losing weight and her clothes started to flap around her as if she were a scare-crow with grandfather's old coat. She looked horrible and felt worse. On top of it all Christmas was coming closer and closer and the last thing she felt like doing was making and buying Christmas gifts and sending cards to relatives and friends. She was looking forward to Christmas with dread instead with anticipation.

Her work suffered, too. She knew it. She even once caught herself thinking: What's the use to gather knowledge? Compared with what there is to learn in this world, all your education is less than a drop of water in the ocean. Why be so uptight about it? Vanity. Vanity of vanities. All is vanity and vexation of spirit. Solomon was right. It was Solomon who wrote this, wasn't it? Today you never knew anymore... Shakespeare wasn't Shakespeare anymore perhaps, Isaiah wasn't just one person, Daniel couldn't always have been who was said he was and so on. Everything was relative. You just

didn't know. What is true? What is not? Pilate had posed that question.

Lee changed her working habits. Normally she corrected and prepared her schoolwork at home in the pleasant surroundings of her books and records. Now her books stared at her, daring her to answer the question which she could not answer: What is truth? So now she stayed at school after four, postponing to go home as long as possible. This was her real battlefield. Here in her own class she was dealing with a concrete case of truth and honesty and not with the abstract philosophy of it like at home. Here she could feel herself getting angry again at the child who caused her all this turmoil and anger was easier to cope with than with the loss of self-confidence.

It was at one of these late afternoons that Mildred entered Lee's room. Without knocking. Lee veered up when she suddenly heard the sound of footsteps. She had been correcting a math test, but her mind had gone astray as so often happened lately.

"Sorry, Lee," Mildred said, "I didn't want to scare you. But you are so jumpy these days. What is bugging you, girl? You look like the death of Pierlala and act at times like a sleepwalker. You're still upset about that puppet?"

"You're darn' right, I am," Lee said more annoyed than she had meant to. "It's no fun to have a kid in your class who hates... who rampages in your room as a bull in a china store and who then acts as normally as possible."

"So you still haven't a clue who hates you?"

"No." Too late Lee realized the trap she was caught in. Okay, so what. She hated the kid, too. At least that feeling was mutual now. If she only knew who it was.

Mildred put a hand on Lee's shoulder. "Don't overreact, Lee. I know what is bugging you. Your pride is hurt. Some child can't stand you. Well, there are worse things in the world. The whole world is filled with people who hate and love each other. There are even people who hate and love a person at the same time. Smarten up and accept the fact. There must be lots of people who can't stand the sight of me. You think I let it bother me? They could bring me to the nuthouse if I did! Think positively. That's what your friend Peale says. Don't ruin your health and happiness by one unknown person."

Lee had managed to get Mildred's hand off her shoulder. Mildred meant well, but the way she called her "Girl" was so protective, almost humiliating.

"I appreciate your concern, Mildred, but I don't think you realize the whole scope of this affair. It is not so much that someone hates me, but that I have 28 kids and can't trust any one of them anymore. That eats you away." It sounded insincere and it was.

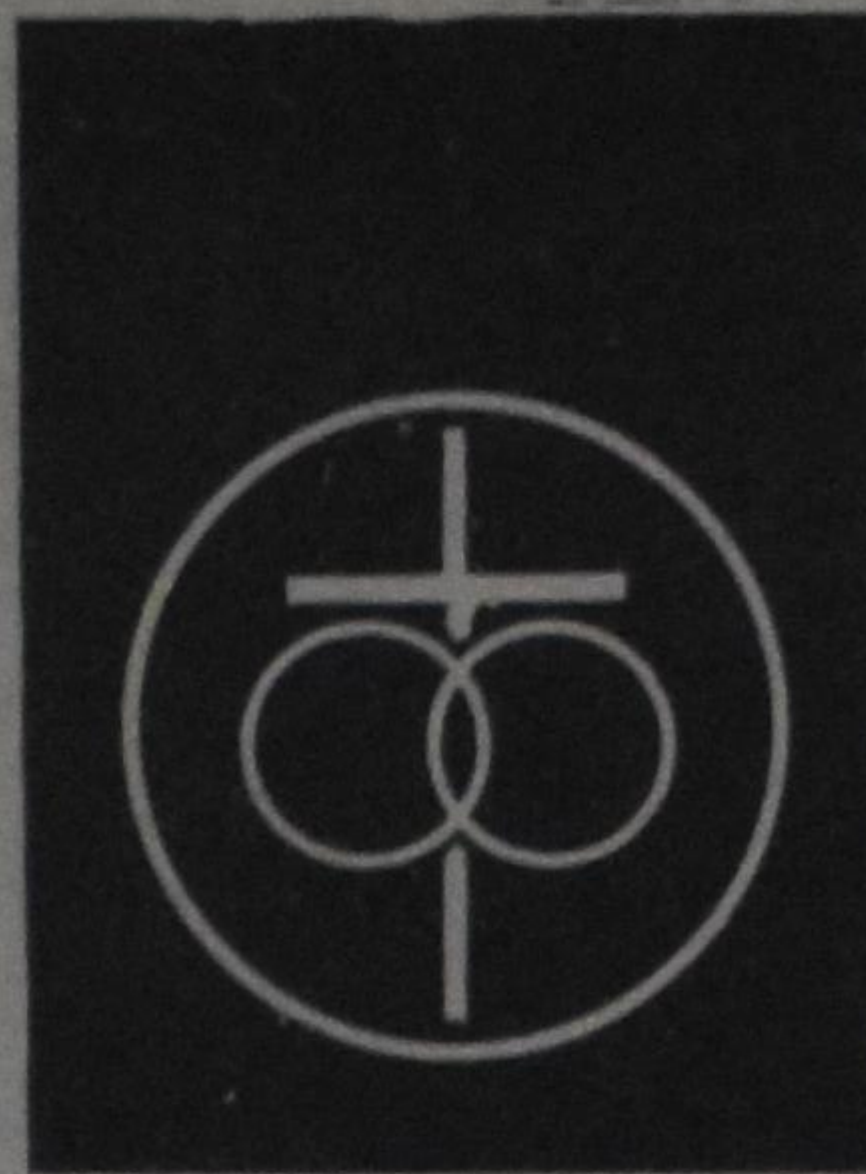
"You're fooling yourself, Lee. You may think that I am here to give you another kick in the pants, but I am not. I don't care anymore if you think that. All I wanted to say is that your whole problem can be stated in two words: Hurt pride. If you just would come down a couple of steps off your proud ladder of conceit and priggishness and learn to accept that you are just a normal person with virtue and vices, you might be able to keep your sanity and live."

"Thanks for your advice," Lee said stiffly, inwardly furious. "If I need any more I certainly know where to get it. I hope you'll leave me alone now. I have work to do."



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for the season

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God is our salvation.
Psalm 68:19

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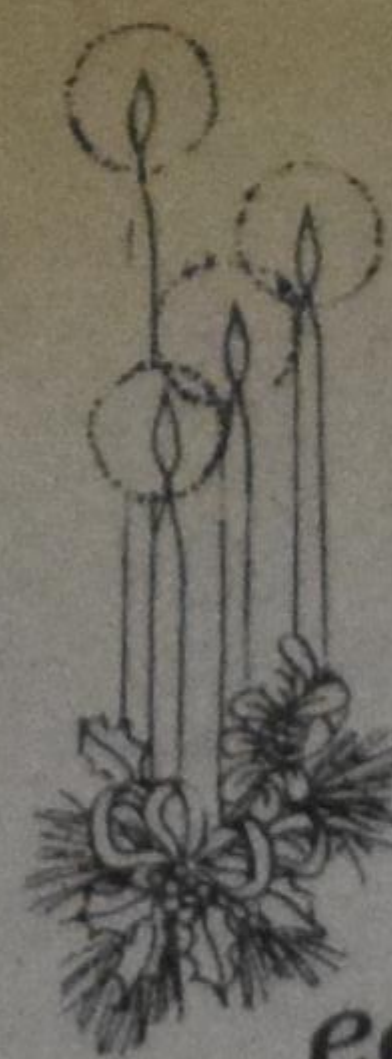
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PEACE
FROM
THE ROCK**
AT KINGSTON
August 1978



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— hosted by the Quinte League —
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The puppet on the blackboard

"Too bad, girl, that you take it like that. It was well meant. But what can you do?" Mildred shrugged her shoulders and wobbled out of the room. As soon as the door was closed behind her, Lee banged her desk with her fist. That headless chicken! How did she dare lecture her! Imagine! "Girl...Girl!!!" As if she was the mother-hen... Well, she certainly looked like one!

Lee fumbled in her handbag for a cigarette. She had quit smoking after her divorce, starting life with a clean slate in every way. Without willing it, she had started to smoke again a few weeks ago. For some reason a cigarette seemed to give her a feeling of security. Stupid of course. While she struck a match she looked at her trembling hands and suddenly noticed that the diamond of her ring was missing. Rob had given her the ring when they got engaged. She had given the wedding ring back, but he had wanted her to keep the engagement ring as a token of the friendship they still felt for each other. She loved the ring. It was very precious to her; not only because of its value, but even more what it conveyed: Two people, once married, were mature and intelligent enough to part in friendship and mutual respect. Now the diamond was gone!

It must have fallen out when I banged the desk, Lee thought worriedly. This shows how stupid it is to lose your temper. Childish. It must be here in the room.

Lee started to search. At once it became a most important matter to find the diamond ring. The ring was her symbol of maturity, self-respect and self-confidence, gained through education and knowledge. Without the ring her status would be lost, defeated.

She crawled on hands and feet over the dusty floor, not minding what it did to her stockings and skirt. She had to find it! She squinted under the desks with her near-sighted eyes and when her only harvest consisted of pieces of paper, chewing gum, marbles, erasers and other treasures from children's pockets, she got her glasses out of her purse. She could see better now, but not good enough. The diamond was gone. Not to be found.

Lee sat down on top of one of the desks. She looked at her dirty hands. The stoneless ring challenged her. "I have to find it," she said aloud with her old determination. This time she was not going to accept defeat. Even if it took her the whole night, she would not leave the room without her diamond.

At the far corner of the wall in the front stood a cupboard filled with books. It could easily have rolled underneath, Lee thought. Gathering all her strength she tried to move the cupboard, but did not succeed. First with her bare hands and then with a yardstick she carefully felt underneath the cupboard. Again what she found was rubbish. That cupboard has to be moved out of the way, Lee decided.

She went to look for the janitor, but he had gone. So had Mildred. The school was empty. All right. Then she would do it herself. Systematically she began to take the contents of the cupboard off the shelves and put it on the first row of desks. It was quite a job, but at last it was done. It still wasn't easy to move the heavy wooden cupboard, but inch by inch Lee got it out of the way. She had switched on all the lights, for darkness was falling rapidly. Again she went on her knees. If I only had a table lamp... Lee thought.

It's still pretty dark here. Then she remembered the desk lamp in James' office. She ran to get it; with her hopes

high that she would find what she was looking for. This time she was lucky! The cord was just long enough to reach the wall plug and a bright beam of light suddenly revealed the many tiny objects which perhaps had been laying in the unreachable corner behind the cupboard for years. Lee picked them up: pencils, ponytail elastics, chalk, a hankie, dice, hockey cards, candy wrappers, and even a watch. Lee looked at the watch a bit closer. This one can't have been here too long, she thought. It's still pretty clean. Only the glass is busted and the strap broke. The buckle was still strapped, but the

"An overwhelming feeling of triumph soared through Lee's body. She found the culprit. What more did she need?"

piece of leather was torn near the watch. Did one of her children lose it? Nobody had said anything about losing it. She didn't recognize it either... Maybe there was some identification on it. She turned it backwards and there in his own neat writing was Rick Finnegan's name. Rick's! How funny that the boy had not mentioned his loss! Lee turned the watch around again and scrutinized it. It was a good watch, of a Swiss make. A fancy watch, too. Complete with calendar and alarm rake. Suddenly Lee's heart skipped a beat. There... that date! October 5! The date of the wreckage of her room! Rick had done it! Rick! There was no doubt about it. Lee's heart was pounding like a drum played by natives for a war dance. She put the watch to her ears. Of course, it had stopped. She tried to wind it, but the spring was broken. It had stopped at 6:47 on October the fifth... and it belonged to Rick Finnegan.

An overwhelming feeling of triumph soared through Lee's body. She got the culprit! With name, time and date! What more did she need? She had found him. At last. By coincidence, okay. So what. What counted was that she finally had him in her power. No escape was possible anymore. Why he had done it? That was a different matter. That wasn't so important. She could deal with that at some time later. First she was going to confront him with his deed. But how? She really should give that much thought. Rick had played hide-and-seek with her, well, she could play cat and mouse with him! Should she go to James first and discuss the matter with him? No. Why should she? James would certainly tackle the case from a totally different angle. The child was sick, he would say. And criminal! Don't forget that part, James!

Lee was all excited. In a rush she started to put the books back on the shelves. Only when she was almost finished, she remembered her lost diamond. For a moment she hesitated. Unpack the cupboard again? Too much work. It could wait. If the diamond was there. It still would be there years from now. Just look at the accumulated debris in the garbage pail. Years old for sure.

Lee got her books together and put on her coat. Saturday tomorrow. No

school. Perhaps just as well. This would give her time to choose the correct strategy of handling the case. She had a whole week-end to think about it before coming eye to eye with Rick Finnegan.

Quickly and with new energy she walked home, her collar high up against the cold wind that brought prickly snow. In her hand she clutched her purse as if she were surrounded by pick-pockets. In it was the watch. Just imagine if she would lose it! Lee smiled. No chance, Rick, she murmured. Now it's your turn to grief. It's about time we get even.

...

The Sunday that followed was a very cold one, bringing the first real blizzard of the year. But people did not complain. It brought them in the Christmas mood. Only one more week and the festivities were there. Feeling suddenly relieved and full of energy again, Lee had started her Christmas shopping the day before. She had to do something in order to keep her mind less occupied with her discovery. She still hadn't decided how to deal with Rick. The busier she was with something else now, the better. She had decided to stay home from church Sunday morning. She had to catch up with so much: Writing letters and cards — which of course would never arrive in time anymore, but better late than never — wrapping presents, baking, making little gifts for the Christmas stockings of her little nephews and nieces, that she could not really afford the time of attending church. Normally she did. Especially now they had a new minister, a young, excellent speaker who always knew to dig up something interesting in an old,



well known Bible story, and who could apply it so logically to the current events of today. A well-read man, too. But today she had to skip him. She could always find a church service on the radio and could listen while she worked.

It was past eleven o'clock when she remembered to do so. She switched on the radio and caught the tail end of the minister's Bible reading: "...even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, and love, these three; but the greatest of these is love." The voice of the minister was a bit shaky, like an October leaf ready to drop on the ground, Lee thought. He must be close to eighty! Lee was annoyed. She loved 1 Corinthians 13. It was one of the most literary parts of the Bible. Beautiful. It was also one of the most preached-on Bible portions and worse was that all sermons related to it sounded the same. With a bit of common sense you could very well predict the flow of thought which the minister — any minister — would follow. She had lost him for a moment.

"...God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that

whoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life", the voice went on. And our third Bible portion is taken from Luke 2:7. "And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn."

Lee went to the radio and searched the stations for another service. Something more exciting and less down-trodden, she thought. She couldn't find anything else and for a moment she was tempted to switch off the radio. Then she decided against it. After all there was more to a service than a sermon. The singing was always nice.

Lee went back to her baking. While the minister's voice droned on, her mind wandered away to Rick. What was the most constructive way to deal with him? First she had to confront him with his deed and then she had to find out what the root was of his criminal behaviour. Why he hated her. That she had to find out, for the more she thought about it, the more she became convinced that Rick somehow had misjudged her. It was totally unreasonable that he should hate her. He had only known her a couple of weeks and she had never done anything to him that could have provoked him one way or the other. Crazy kid, to do a thing like that... But he ought to be punished... The police had to know and most likely she would have to lay a charge against him. Take him to juvenile court. That would teach him a lesson. James might not like it. After all, the name and good standing of the school was in jeopardy, too... perhaps James would like to smooth things over... it was such a long time ago also. But she wouldn't agree with that; it was her student, her classroom and the anger was directed at her alone. James didn't know this, of course, and hopefully Rick wouldn't tell him. If he did she couldn't help it anyhow. Besides his reason for hating her was absurd. James would realize that too.

"...that what this whole Bible portion means," the radio voice cut in. "If the most famous doctor did a perfect heart transplant for example and he did not love his patient, his brilliant operation wouldn't mean a thing for the Lord. If an expert pianist kept his listeners spellbound by his magnificent performance and he didn't honour and love his Maker by it, his music would sound like a clanging cymbal in God's ears. If a man was as wise as Solomon, filled with knowledge and understanding, and had no love for those around him; all his learning would be like a hollow vessel in God's eyes. Love is the greatest..."

"Perhaps you think you love. You do nobody any harm; you don't short-change people; you don't cheat or steal or gossip or hate. You act perfectly decent, perfectly civilized, but still that is not the same as loving!"

The man is even getting agitated, Lee thought, now he's warmed up. All he is saying has been said thousands of times before. The same, old, worn-out slogans in perhaps what different wording.

"What is this love?," the minister asked, raising his voice a few notes higher. "This is what I like to discuss with you at this service. Love means sacrifice: God gave His Son to die for us. Love means: Humility. The Christ was born in a manger, a container for cattle fodder, for there was no room for the King of heaven and earth in this world. Love means: Self-denial. Jesus died on the cross to save us, good-for-nothing sinners. These then are my three points of this sermon: Sacrifice,



**God wants us
to meet Jesus
at Bethlehem
[His first coming]
before we meet Him
as Judge
[His second coming].
In this Christmas season,
let's do all
we can
to focus attention
on the first coming
as we prepare ourselves
for the second coming
in glory,
when the ends
of the earth
will see
the salvation
of our Lord.**

Best wishes from all of us:

Harry der Nederlanden
Rose der Nederlanden
George Hultink
Jenny Hultink
John Hultink
Gay Knight
John Knight
Jennifer Langendoen
Mary Plantinga
Richard Plantinga
Ted Plantinga
Wilma Prinsen
Perry Recker
Elisabeth Runner
H. Evan Runner
Cathy Schilperoort
Eric Schilperoort
Karen Smith
Karl Vahrmeier



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December 1

I Thessalonians 1:1-10

JESUS IS COMING

When the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth? (Luke 18:8).

The big event in the month of December is Christmas, the date on which people traditionally remember that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, a small town five miles south of Jerusalem.

But there are really two comings of the Lord. The first one is remembered at Christmas. The second one is "near," the Bible assures us. If you are happy that Jesus came the first time, you should be overjoyed to know that He is coming again.

Christians cannot think of Christ's first coming, as a baby, without making ready for His coming as Lord.

You might say that there is only one message in the Bible: *Jesus is coming!* In Old Testament times people did not say that they were waiting for Jesus. They did not yet know His name. They were expecting a Savior whom they called *Son of David* or *Messiah*. Or they would simply say that they were waiting for the coming of the *Lord*. They looked for the day when God would set things straight in the world. At any rate, they were always looking forward, expecting the *coming*.

The New Testament brings us Christ and all His benefits. Here we also learn that the complete revelation of God's Kingdom involves two comings of Jesus—His coming with grace and His return in glory. Therefore the message has not changed: *Jesus is coming!* And the people of the new covenant live just the way the people of the old covenant lived—always looking forward, always expecting the coming.

There is one Bible message—the coming of Jesus! And there must be one response—readiness, faith!

In the midst of all the preparations for Christmas this month, the big question may not be suppressed: When the Son of man comes, will He find faith on earth?

We must live this month with gladness and soberness. We may enjoy what we received—as long as we look forward to what is coming.

December 17

Isaiah 52:7-10

THE GOSPEL SOUND

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good tidings (Is. 52:7; Rom. 10:15).

The tiding of the birth of Jesus is called the "good news" or the "gospel." This expression comes from Isaiah's vision of the messenger of good news, who approaches over the mountains to bring joy to Zion. Beginning with New Testament times, telling about Jesus is always "proclaiming good news."

The first good tiding was brought by a heavenly messenger, who said: "I bring you good news of a great joy" (Luke 2:10). That was in the night when Jesus was born.

Some of us have heard so often and so much about Jesus that we get accustomed to the gospel. That's dangerous. When the gospel has become an old tale and the sermon a piece of information, we are in deadly danger, for the story about Jesus is, first and last, good news, a tiding of joy.

If you want to know again what good news is, think back to the situation in the Netherlands in the year 1945. It was spring, after the most fearful winter Europe had ever known. Sons were murdered, fathers were powerless, daughters were insecure, and mothers could no longer give daily food to their children. People died of starvation. And they cried to God under the heel of the Nazi oppressor. They met in churches. And in the long, dark nights (there was no electricity), they prayed fervently for freedom, for help, for a way out.

On the evening of May 4, a rumor went through the country. It was an electrifying rumor, and it went faster than a prairie fire: "It's over! The war is over! Peace!"

Not one healthy person stayed in his chair. Crowds went out into the dark streets. Someone started to sing—a song of liberty. And all were filled with joy.

This comes closest to what happened at Christmas. It was in that night that the heavens were opened and a voice said: "It's over! It's all over! Now the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God."

These meditations are taken from the Rev. Andrew Kuyvenhoven's new book Daylight: Daily Readings with the Bible

The puppet on the blackboard

humility, self-denial. These three facets of love are interwoven, intertwined, inseparable. Let us first consider then..."

Lee sighed. An old-fashioned sermon in three points! The man must be eighty indeed! Nobody preached any more in that way. With a quick move she turned off the set. She had to write cards and letters and couldn't do two things at a time anyhow. The man had nothing new to tell her.

She went back to work, but she was unable to keep her mind at it, occupied as it was with Rick. When she had made the same addressing mistake for the third time, she pushed the cards away. Why not see Rick first? Get it done and over with. Most likely his parents would be home today, too. Just as well. She tidied up her room, changed into a neat dress and took a cup of coffee with a cracker for lunch. She would drive or walk around for a while first; get her plans better organized. Somehow she always could think better while walking. Less than an hour later she was on her way. Fortunately there weren't too many Finnegan's in the phone book and only one with the initial W.J. That was how his father had signed the note giving Rick permission to go on the nature trail. She had remembered that well, for the signature had been clear and yet personal and attractive.

The house, a big, old fashioned building, stood in one of the best neighbourhoods of town. Lee noticed that part of the house was used for office. A modest sign in the front lawn read "chiropractor." It gave Lee a little shock. She had never given it much thought what Rick's father would do for a living. What had she expected? Lee smiled a bit nervously. An expensive watch was no longer any indication about the social status of people. On the contrary. Today the children of the unskilled labourers were the ones who came to school with Levi shirts and fancy boots.

"Get hold of yourself and be in charge, she told herself, ringing the doorbell. Not being able to know Rick's family circumstances, she had realized that it was folly to try to prepare herself for this visit. She would deal with the situation as it developed.

A rather sour looking woman, dressed in an ill fitting pant suit, opened the door. "Yes?", a shrill voice said, "What can I do for you?"

Lee felt taken aback. She had visualized a different person for Rick's mother, going by the signature of his father, and the apparently well to do upper class neighbourhood. She felt like a saleswoman of Fuller Brush.

"I would like to talk to Rick, if he is home," she said. "I am his school teacher."

The woman nodded and left her standing outside with the door ajar. Lee bit her lips. That woman could be taught some manners! Imagine to talk to Rick here outside on the front steps! It seemed to take minutes before Rick came to the door. He was wearing jeans and a shirt which missed two buttons. He just looked at her without saying a word. Lee watched his face. It bore no expression different from that in the classroom. It was bland, and yet... blank. Lee noticed that for the first time.

"I would like to discuss something, Rick."

Rick shrugged his shoulders. "Okay with me."

"Can I perhaps come in?"

"I guess so..."

Lee stepped inside. The hall was nicely furnished with a thick carpet and an oak table on which a pewter jug

with dusty dried flowers was placed. An oak coat rack and umbrella stand were standing in opposite corners. A heavy tweed man's coat was hanging on the rack by one of the sleeves. The knob of the rack made a bulge in the sleeve. Apparently the loop had broken Lee thought, as there were no coat hangers. She didn't know what to say now she was inside. How to open the trial... Rick didn't seem to be shocked or ill at ease... Was she wrong in her accusation? It couldn't be.

"I have something which I think belongs to you, Rick," she finally said, watching his face. A glint of interest came into Rick's eyes. She took the watch from her handbag and handed it to him, observing his face like a hawk its prey. Rick took the watch and with a feeling of immense relief Lee saw how a frightened look swept over his face, chasing away the sterile expression of his eyes. She had been right!! He had done it!

"Where... how did you get it...?" Rick's voice trembled.

"That's what I would like to discuss with you. Could we perhaps discuss this matter in the presence of your parents?" She certainly didn't like to be accused of harassing the kid later-on. Let his parents be the witnesses.

"I... I don't know..." Suddenly Rick resembled a little scared rabbit, caught in the blinding glare of an automobile light.

"What's going on, Ricky?" a voice called. The next moment a heavy set man in the early forties walked towards the hall. His thick hair was greying at the sides and he had pouches under his eyes. Lack of sleep or drinking, Lee thought.



"I'm Rick's teacher, Mr. Finnegan. Mrs. Wilson. Lee Wilson. There's something I would like to discuss with you and your wife. It concerns your son Rick."

For one brief moment a look of intense grief saddened Mr. Finnegan's face. He must have had more trouble with Rick, Lee concluded and she felt sorry for him. He seemed a nice man. Quite different from his wife.

"Please, come into the room... No, let's go to the office. That's more private."

Shouldn't your wife be present, too? Lee wanted to ask, but then she shut her mouth. That was up to him.

The office was pleasantly furnished. Rows of books lined the shelves. A group of pictures, depicting a charlatan in the Middle Ages busy with his medical work in the street, decorated the wall behind the huge desk. Then she saw the painting... hanging on the wall across. Lee gaped at it for several moments. It was a painting of a beautiful, young looking woman, full of life and with a beaming smile, which seemed to start in the eyes and then

spread to the half-open mouth with the even teeth to the rest of the face. The face was familiar to her. It was Rick's...

A feeling of nausea made Lee dizzy and she had to steady herself against the desk. The painting held her gaze in a tight embrace.

"My wife..." Mr. Finnegan said softly. "She died last June in a car accident."

The room spun around in circles. Lee closed her eyes to regain her balance. She should've eaten a better lunch...

Mr. Finnegan quickly got a chair.

"In spite of all her knowledge, she never really catered to his real need. He had been longing for understanding."

"Please, sit down... You didn't know?"

Lee shook her head. No, she didn't. She had had Rick in her class for more than 3½ months and she did not know that he had just lost his beautiful, life-loving mother! Rick had come from another school. She had never even bothered to ask why.

"She was a lovely person..." Mr. Finnegan said with longing. "Such a warm, buoyant personality... And then one day, dead. Gone. Forever. I still can't believe it. That's why we moved to this part of town. We just couldn't bear it to be surrounded by all those memories of happier days..."

"I'm sorry... I'm so sorry... I didn't know..." Lee didn't dare to look up. Tears burned behind her eyes. What a grief, what a sadness... The man was lonely, grief-stricken... They must have had a beautiful marriage... And Rick, poor, poor boy... Rick! What was she doing here?

"What is the reason of your visit, Mrs... Mrs. Wilson?"

Lee looked up. Why had she come? Because Rick hates me and I want to find out why. He wrecked my room and he's going to bleed for it. That's why she had come. What a ridiculous reason! His mother was killed in an accident. His mother was dead. Dead... The word droned in Lee's mind like formations of airplanes flying by. No sound came over her lips.

"You're not feeling well..." Mr. Finnegan said. "Rick, ask Miss Spike to make some tea. I'll get you a glass of water."

Lee drank it with tiny sips, her teeth clattering against the cool glass. She looked up at the trustworthy face of the man who showed such a concern for her. When she had calmed down and was able to control herself again, she told him with a few words why she had come. "Last September someone wrecked my room. It was not until Friday that I learned that it had been Rick... I found his watch with his name and the date on when it had happened..."

Mr. Finnegan's sadness deepened. He asked questions, details. And suddenly Lee talked. It was as if the painting on the wall had opened the secret doors of her heart and the hidden, angry feelings, the agonizing

frustrations and her hurt pride came tumbling out as if it were an overfilled closet which door was abruptly and cruelly pulled open.

"I... I understand now how much Rick must be suffering inside," Lee concluded. "I never knew. I was never interested in the children's home life, only in their academic performance. Yet I still don't know why he was angry at me... Why he took it out on me and not on somebody else..."

"Perhaps I can shed some light on it," Mr. Finnegan said. "You see, the name of the woman who caused the accident and the death of my wife was Wilson. She was talking with a girlfriend and went through a red light, not seeing the car my wife was driving..."

Rick came in, carrying a tray with tea and cookies. His father took it over. "Sit down Rick," he said. "We have a serious business to discuss, don't we?" He put the tray on his desk and put his arm about the child's quivering shoulders. "You did it, didn't you?"

Rick nodded. "And why, my son? Because of her name? She didn't do anything unkind to you, did she Rick?"

Rick was sobbing and had his head buried in his arms. With a sudden jerk he looked up. His tear-stained face expressed anger.

"But she was! She was...! She was just like that woman in the car who didn't see Mom and who killed her! She never saw me either! She never cared what I did as long as my work was okay... She only saw my work, but not me... not ME!"

The pointed finger and stretched out arm seemed to pierce Lee's soul as a two-edged sword. "She never saw me either..." How true, Lee thought, how perfectly true... She had not realized this before, but a twelve year old boy had! In spite of all the knowledge which she might have pumped into him, she had never catered to his real need; had never even been aware of it because she had only been interested in his intellect, his ability and ambition to study... like she had been with all of her other students in the past and present. Rick had been waiting, longing for a special kind word, for some understanding and comfort and help.

She had listened to his reading of a French story, but had been deaf to the cry of grief in his heart. She had seen his tests, analyzed every sentence he had put down, even the writing and neatness of the work she had taken into account, but she had not seen his broken heart and the hidden grief. She, that perfect teacher! No wonder that Rick in all his frustration had to wreck her room in order to get her attention... A quotation of Pascal, the French religious philosopher of the 17th century came to her mind: *Le coeur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît pas*. "The heart has its reasons which reason knows nothing of..." How true, how true...

"Rick... you're right... I... I didn't see you, not really. I'm so sorry...", she said, walking up to the child and putting a hand on his shoulder. "I've been so angry with you, although for months I didn't know that it was you. I was going to find out who had done it and why and how. I at first refused to believe it that one of my children had done it, but there was the puppet on the blackboard... You wanted me to know that what you did was directed at me, right?"

"Yes... The first few days I liked you... I liked the way you taught, but soon I knew that all you were interested in was teaching... You

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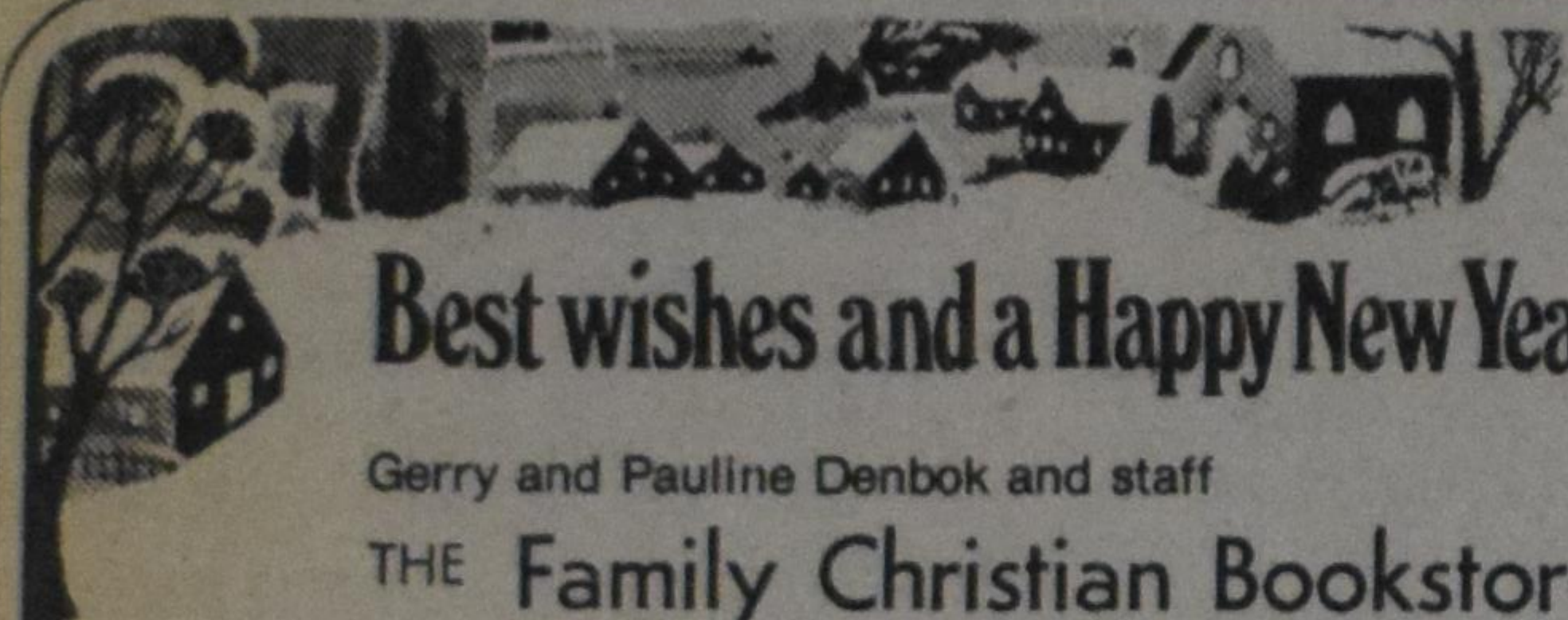
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The puppet on the blackboard

couldn't care less whether I had a mother or not... And then I started to think about a plan to hurt you back and one day I found the janitor's keys of the school and during lunch hour I had a duplicate set made. He never noticed that I took them, I guess. And that's how I could enter the school... It was October the fifth... my Mom's birthday... and I just couldn't take it anymore..."

Rick was crying again and his father took him in his arms as if he were still a toddler.

Lee stood in the middle of the office, not knowing what to do. The poured tea was getting cold and she herself, too, felt cold, worn-out. Defeated. She did not belong here. She had no right to be here. She who had come as an accuser was now self the accused. The trial had suddenly switched personalities. She'd better go now and said so.

"No, don't go yet," Mr. Finnegan said. "This is not the right way to part. Ricky was wrong in venting his anger the way he did; you were wrong in not helping him and I was wrong in not making more time available for him, so I would've known what was bugging him..." He stroked Rick over his head. "Run along, son and put some water on in the kitchen for a fresh cup of tea. We will talk later together... I like to talk a bit more with your teacher."

Lee, who had been sitting down again, walked up to Rick. "I'm so sorry, Rick, I... I feel awful... I'll like to do better from now on. Perhaps someday we can be friends..."

Rick looked up. "I felt rotten, too, all those weeks... I'm in a way happy that you know it now, but I'm not angry anymore. It wasn't only your fault."

"He's such a sensitive, introvert child," Mr. Finnegan said. "He has the good looks of my wife, but my character... that makes it at times so hard for us two to communicate. He's the only child we... I have, that makes it harder yet." He sighed. "My business demands so much time. It is nice to make good money, it gives satisfaction, too, when you can help ailing people, but still your own child comes first. In spite of our good intentions, we often don't have our priorities right."

Lee thought about that when she left some time later. She had left the car where it was parked and started to walk away from town. She had to think. She had the feeling hundreds of tiny wheels were turning in her head, setting feelings into motion which she never had experienced before. Behind her eyes tears were burning. Dry, hot tears that consumed her pride, her arrogance, conceit and self-confidence. An overwhelming feeling of shame took its place. A zero she was. A nothing; a clanging cymbal... Who had said that so shortly ago? Oh, yes, the minister on the radio this morning. But she had switched him off. He hadn't been good enough for her! Yet he had brought God's message... With a sudden shock Lee was confronted with another truth: In reality she had switched God off and she had been

doing that for so long, so long...

She felt the hot stings of her tears coming to the surface. Don't cry, she told herself. Get hold of yourself. But God had gotten hold of her and so she did cry.

Lee walked and walked. The snow crunched under her feet. Evening was falling fast now. The Christmas trees and outside decorations were lit. The wind was cold and biting in her face, but she didn't notice it. At last the noise of the town was behind her and the Christmas lights had made room for millions of radiant stars in the velvety sky. Lee didn't see it. Her heart ached with emptiness. A clanging cymbal... The words kept cropping up. The wind hurled them into her face; the snow moaned them under her feet: A clanging cymbal... A nothing, a nothing... What was truth?, the trees along the road asked her mockingly. A clanging cymbal, it echoed from all around her.

The big, strong wall, which she had built herself with bricks of pride and self-love, was now lying crumbled at her feet. Her protection was gone. She was alone, cold, empty, and desperate. How could she ever make undone what she had done to Rick and hundreds of others? To Mildred? Good, well-meaning Mildred who had protected her by not revealing the

puppet on the blackboard... who had tried to help her... And others, countless others... even Rob perhaps...

"God, please forgive me, forgive me...", Lee prayed. "I'm a nothing, I'm sick of myself... and how sick You must be of me! What am I going to do... God! Please, help me... I'm stuck. Stuck!"

The wind carried her sobs away and the sardonic jeer: A clanging cymbal, was silenced. Fragments of a sermon came floating to her mind from the serene sky around her. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son... Love means sacrifice, humility, self-denial... The greatest of all is Love... Christmas. That was Christmas: The manifestation of God's love, the humble birth of the King of Kings, the sacrifice on the cross to forgive sinners."

Slowly the truth dawned on Lee. The truth. With God there was no relativism, only security, safety. And forgiveness! She was not stuck; the road was wide open and lit by the star of the Saviour's birth.

Acting on an impulse, Lee turned around. Her steps quickened and with a brisk movement of her mittened hand she wiped the tears of her face. A feeling of immense gratitude swept over her. She was going to celebrate Christmas! She was going to start a different kind of life. She wasn't sure yet as how to go about it, but that didn't matter. Somehow she would learn, for wasn't the Christmas Child's name Immanuel, God with us?

Lee smiled and walked faster. Suddenly she was in a hurry. So much had to be done yet...

MY GIFT

What can I give Him
Poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd,
I would give Him a lamb,
If I were a Wise Man,
I would do my part,—
But what I can I give Him,
Give my heart.

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De woorden van het oude kerstverhaal
spreken voor ons een onverstaanbre taal.

Want wie gelooft er in een engelenlied
als hij het duivelse op aarde ziet?

Wie laat er nu nog alles in de steek
alleen omdat hij naar de hemel keek?

Wij geven U geen myrrhe of wierook meer,
en 't goud kunnen wij zelf gebruiken, Heer.

Wanneer men nu de kinderen vermoordt
wordt er nog nauwelijks protest gehoord.

De herders vonden 't Kind en spraken over Hem;
Wij zwijgen nog na twintig eeuwen Bethlehem.

Wat moet het toch verdrietig voor U zijn
dat wij zo groot doen — want U werd zo klein.

Wij zijn de kindren van een harde, koude tijd,
maar laat ons zien, dat Gij toch onze Vader zijt.

Dat Gij ons zoekt in onze duisternis
omdat Uw liefde onveranderd is.

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Season's Greetings

We wish our relatives and friends a merry Christmas and a happy New Year.

Fam. S. Antonides, 1216 Whittington Rd., Mississauga, Ont. L5J 3J9.

Wij wensen de familie en vrienden een gelukkig Kerstfeest en veel heil en zegen in het Nieuwe jaar.

Mr. & Mrs. J. Bouwers, R.R. #2, Brampton, Ont.

We wish all our family and friends a happy Christmas and the Lord's blessing for 1978.

Fam. R. Bouwers, 70 Maple Cres., Orangeville, Ontario.

Andrew and Joanne Buwalda, sons Timothy and David, heartily wish all their friends and relatives a wonderful Christmas and a blessed New Year.

665 Radisson Ave., Oshawa, Ont. L1J 1X7.

Mr. and Mrs. A. deBeer wish all our children, grandchildren, friends and neighbours a blessed Christmas and a happy New Year.

18 Kingsmere Cres., Brampton, Ont.

Aan familie, vrienden en bekenden wensen we God's zegen toe voor het jaar 1978.

Mr. & Mrs. O. DeBoer, 107 Andrew St. N., Hay Post, Exeter, Ont.

Wij wensen al onze familie, vrienden en bekenden een gezegend Kerstfeest en een voorspoedig Nieuwjaar.

Mrs. G. de Bruyn en Fam., Grimsby, Ontario.

We wish all our relatives and friends a blessed Christmas and a New Year of peace and happiness.

Mr. & Mrs. W. DeVries, 2 White St., Apt. 111, St. Catharines.

To family and friends we hereby extend our best wishes for the Christmas season and for the coming New Year.

Harry and Erna DeVries, Hamilton, Ontario.

Wij wensen al de familie en vrienden gezellige Kerstdagen toe, en een gezegend Nieuwjaar.

Mr. & Mrs. W. DeVries, 2 White St., Apt. 111, St. Catharines.

We wish all our friends and relatives the joys and blessings of Christmas and God's guidance throughout 1978.

Wim & Truus DeVries, 493 West 5th, Hamilton, Ont.

We like to wish all our relatives and friends a blessed Christmas and the Lord's guidance and blessing for the year 1978.

Thomas & Renee Draaistra, 1 Slessor Blvd, Apt. 307, Grimsby, Ont.

Mr. & Mrs. Sytze Dryfhout wensen langs deze weg alle familie, vrienden en bekenden een gezegend Kerstfeest en Gods onmisbare zegen voor het jaar 1978.

67 Railroad St., Brampton, Ont. L6X 1G5.

Familie, vrienden en bekenden prettige Kerstdagen en God's onmisbare zegen voor 't Nieuwe jaar toegewenst.

Mrs. Tj. Ellens-vanKalsbeek, 1466 Exmouth St., Sarnia, N7S 3X9.

We wish all our relatives and friends a blessed Christmas and a happy New Year.

Mr. and Mrs. S. Feddema, Bowmanville, Ont.

We wish all our friends and relatives a Merry Christmas and a happy New Year.

John & Hilda Gerritsen, 2 White St., Bld. B, Apt. 202, St. Catharines, Ont. L2N 1Z2.

Wij wensen Familie, Vrienden en bekenden een gezegend Kerstfeest en de beste wensen voor het jaar 1978.

Mr. & Mrs. Corn. Guther, 590 Stone Church Rd. E., Hamilton, Ont. L8W 1A6.

To all our family and friends: May the Peace and Happiness of Christmas be yours today, and every day throughout the coming New Year.

Mr. & Mrs. John Guetter Sr., G.M.B. 901, R.R. #5, Clinton, Ont. N0M 1L0.

We wish all our friends and relatives a Blessed Christmas and a Happy and Prosperous New Year.

Tip and Winnie Haagsma; Mark, Anthony and Donald, 4 South Bay Close, South Bay Villa-A4, Repulse Bay, Hong Kong.

Mr. and Mrs. W.R. Haan of Whitby wish all their family and friends a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

We wish all our friends and relatives the joys and blessings of Christmas, and a happy and prosperous New Year.

Mr. & Mrs. C. Hagen, 607 West 5th, Hamilton, Ont.

We like to wish all our friends and relatives a blessed Christmas and the Lord's guidance and blessing for the year 1978.

Tim & Anna Hessels and family, R.R. #3 Wellandport, Ont.

We wish all our relatives, friends and acquaintances far and near, a blessed Christmas and a happy and prosperous 1978.

Wick and Henny Heuving and Family, Grimsby, Ontario.

To all our family and friends, A Blessed Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Harry, Jane, Harvey, Janet and Alan Hiddema, R.R. #1 Moorefield, Ont.

We wish all our relatives and friends a blessed Christmas and the Lord's blessing for 1978.

Mr. & Mrs. E. Hiemstra Orange Grove Park, Lot 90, 26th St. Cortez Rd., Bradenton, Florida, U.S.A. 33507-Winter residents.

We wish all our relatives, friends and acquaintances a happy Christmas and a blessed 1978.

Mr. & Mrs. S. Hiemstra, 405-745 Stevenson Rd. N., Oshawa, Ont.

We wish all our friends and relatives the joys and blessings of Christmas, and a happy and prosperous New Year.

Gerrit & Joukje Hummel, R.R. #1, Monkland, Ont.

H. & C. Janssen wish relatives and friends a very nice Christmas season and a blessed 1978. May it be filled with happiness and contentment.

Fly Rd., R.R. #1, Vineland, Ont. L0R 2C0.

We wish family and friends a blessed Christmas, and a happy New Year.

Hank & Hilly Janssen, and family, 65 Rosedale Ave., Brampton, Ont.

Aan familie, vrienden en bekenden, wensen wij een gezegend Kerstfeest en 's Heren zegen in het Nieuwe jaar 1978 toe.

Mr. & Mrs. P. Karsten, Drayton, Ont.

To relatives and friends a blessed Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Mr. & Mrs. R. Karsten, 13425-57 St., Edmonton, Alta.

Mrs. R. Kiers, Sunset Homes, Apt. 106, St. Catharines, Ont., wenst heel haar familie, vrienden en bekenden een gezegend Kerstfeest en een voorspoedig Nieuwjaar.

The Adrian Kloet family wish all friends and family a Blessed Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Shalom! 111 Alderson Dr., Hamilton, Ont.

Mrs. Margaret Knecht and Jake wensen u gezellige Kerstdagen en God's zegen in het Nieuwe jaar.

37 Kerman, Unit 17, Grimsby, Ont. L3M 3W3.

With thankfulness we remember all the loving care we experienced in 1977. We wish our relatives and friends God's abiding love at Christmas time, and throughout the New Year.

Fam. H. Kooiman, 28 King W., Apt. 608, Stoney Creek, Ont. L8G 1H4

Aan onze familie, vrienden en bekenden een gezegend Kerstfeest, en een voorspoedig 1978 toegewenst.

Jan en Maria Koops, 73 Earls Court Cres., Woodstock, Ont.

To all our friends and acquaintances this brings a prayer at Christmas time, that God will bless you and your loved ones with lasting happiness! Also a Happy and Prosperous New Year.

Bep & Simon Kort; Rob and Paul, 35 Diana Ave., Grimsby, Ont.

Wij wensen familie, vrienden, en bekenden gezegende Kerstdagen en nieuwjaar toe.

Teun & Hennie Marissen, R.R. #4, Aylmer, Ont.

Mr. & Mrs. G. Melenberg of Edmonton wish all their friends in Canada a Blessed Christmas and New Year 1978.

Edmonton, Alta.

Mrs. A. Miedema, Sunset Homes, Apt. 114 wenst haar familie, vrienden en bekenden een Gezegend Kerstfeest en een gelukkig Nieuwjaar.

Alle vrienden en bekenden van harte een Gezegend Kerstfeest en Gelukkig Nieuwjaar toegewenst.

Mrs. R. Moes 3260 New St., Apt. 113 Burlington, Ont. L7N 3J4.

Mr. & Mrs. A. Mulder gaan langs deze weg, aan al hun familie, vrienden en bekenden een rijk gezegend Kerstfeest toe wensen. En voor het jaar 1978 een jaar van rijke voorspoed hun in alles onmisbare zegen toegewenst.

608 Stone Church Rd., Hamilton, Ont.

May all our relatives and friends experience the true joy of Christmas and God's nearness throughout the coming year.

Dick & Rie Nanninga, 5 Rothsay Rd., Thornhill, Ont.

Alle vrienden en bekenden van harte een Gezegend Kerstfeest en gelukkig Nieuwjaar toegewenst.

Mrs. J. Nusselder, 3260 New St., Apt. 218, Burlington, Ont. L7N 3L4.

Mrs. G. Ouwehand wishes to all her family and friends in Ontario, B.C. and U.S.A. a Blessed Christmas and a Happy New Year.

R.R. #4, Dunnville, Ont.

We wish all our relatives, friends and acquaintances a blessed Christmas and also the Lord's blessings in the New Year.

Mr. & Mrs. G. Pasma, and family, 263 Clarks Rd., London, Ont. N5W 5E7.

God grant you faith, That wavers never, And may His Love be yours forever... And may the meaning of Christmas impart God's Peace and Joy within your heart,

is being wished to you this Christmas by: Mr. & Mrs. J.A. Reckman & family, 1165 Telfer St. Rd., Sarnia Twp., Ont. N7T 7H8.

To all our relatives and friends a blessed Christmas and a happy New Year.

Frances and Gerald Rhebergen and family.

Wishing relatives and friends a blessed Christmas and New Year.

Cor & Reini Schuurman and family, R.R. #2 Branchton, Ont.

Wij wensen al onze familie, vrienden en bekenden een gezegend Kerstfeest en een voorspoedig 1978.

Mr. & Mrs. J. Snyder, 62 Wellington St. W., Brampton, Ont. L6Y 1K9.

We would like to wish all our friends and relatives a joyous Christmas and God's richest blessing in the coming New Year.

Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Sol Jr., Lyn, Randy, Jeff. Woodstock, Ont.

Mr. and Mrs. A. Straatsma Sr., Brampton wensen alle familie, vrienden en kennissen een gezegend Kerstfeest en een gelukkig Nieuwjaar in 1978 toe.

Albert en Jetsche Talsma van Bowmanville wensen de hele familie en vrienden en bekenden prettige Kerstdagen en een gezegend 1978 toe.

To all our friends and relatives we wish Christ's peace and joy for the Christmas season and throughout the New Year.

David & Jenny Tigchelaar, Kevin, Jana and Kim, 8 Audrey St., St. Catharines, Ont.

Season Greetings to all family, relatives and friends in the surrounding area of Clinton, Ontario.

Alice Valkenburg, Teresa Greidanus, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Mr. & Mrs. Jacob Vandenberg wish all the relatives and friends, God's blessings for Christmas and the coming New Year.

R.R. #1, Caistor Centre, Ont. L0R 1E0.

We wish all our family and friends a happy Christmas and the Lord's blessings for 1978.

John and Judith VanderKooi and family, Box 128, Picture Butte, Alberta, T0K 1V0.

Wij wensen al onze familie, vrienden, bekenden een Gezegend Kerstfeest en een Gelukkig Nieuwjaar.

Mr. & Mrs. Wm. Vanderlinde, 1371 La Salle Rd., Sarnia, Ont.

Mrs. E. VanderStoep wil langs deze weg alle familie en kennissen D.V. een gezellige Kerst en een gelukkig Nieuwjaar toewensen.

Maranatha Home, 3260 Apt. 209, Burlington, Ont. L7N 3L4.

From our house to your house, we wish all our dear relatives, friends, and acquaintances, far and near, sincere wishes for a Christ-centered Christmas. As we enter the New Year with a new challenge may He continue to be our guide. (Psalm 48:14). Love and greetings for a happy New Year.

Aukje & Fred VanderVelde and children: Edward, Lucinda, Douglas and Anna.

Aan alle familie, vrienden en bekenden gezegende Kerstdagen en een gelukkig Nieuwjaar toegewenst.

Fam. Cor VanDijk, 4 Edward Ave., St. Catharines, Ont. L2N 1J9.

Aan familie, vrienden en bekenden, wensen wij een gezegend Kerstfeest en 's Heren zegen in het Nieuwe jaar toe.

Mr. & Mrs. C. VanGeest Sr., 34 Kerman Ave., Grimsby, Ont.

We wish all our relatives, friends and acquaintances a blessed Christmas and New Year.

Rev. & Mrs. J. Van Harmelen, Woodstock, Ontario.

Aan familie en vrienden wensen we Gezegende Kerstdagen en Gods Zegen voor het Nieuwe jaar.

Mr. en Mrs. A. VanHuizen, 5631 No. 2 Rd., Richmond, B.C. V7C 3L2.

Gezegende Kerstdagen en Nieuwjaar toegewenst aan familie, vrienden en bekenden.

Mrs. T. van Manen, 25 Tofield Cr., Rexdale, Ont. M9W 2B8.

We wish all our relatives and friends a blessed Christmas and a prosperous 1978.

Bert & Aleda Van Soelen & Family, R.R. #2 Dunnville, Ontario.

John and Mary Van Staalduinen wish all their friends and acquaintances far and near a Blessed Christmas and also the Lord's Blessings in the Year 1978.

O use me Lord, use even me, Just as You will and when and where, And give Us your blessing in 1978.

Mr. & Mrs. M. VanWyck, 33 Fennel Ave., Apt. 1602, Hamilton, Ont. L9H 1R6.

To all our friends, we send our best wishes. May the joy brought by the birth of Christ dwell in you also through 1978.

Jack and Ike Veenstra and Family, Drayton, Ontario.

John and Gerrie Veenstra and family wish all their friends and acquaintances a blessed Christmas and a happy New Year.

46 Anderson Ave., Toronto, Ont.

Mr. & Mrs. N. Vreugdenhil, 38 Buchingham, Brantford, Ont zijn God dankbaar voor al de zegeningen en ontvangen in 1977 en wensen familie, vrienden en bekenden rijk gezegende Kerstdagen en God's zegen toe in het jaar 1978.

Vanuit Red Deer, Alta. wensen Mr. & Mrs. F. Zee-Prins, al onze kinderen en kleinkinderen, familie, vrienden en kennissen, waar dan ook, door God gezegende Kerstdagen en 1978 toe.

Site 4, Box 4, R.R. #2, Red Deer, Alta. T4N 5E2.

We wish our family and friends a blessed Christmas and a happy New Year.

P. & M. Zylstra, nee Doornenbat, 872 Upper Gage Ave., Apt. 101, Hamilton, Ontario, L8V 4K6.

The Gift of Peace

A Christmas story for children by Berta Hosmar

With a start Lynn woke up from a pleasant dream. Her heart was pounding and it took her a few minutes before she realized that she was in her own bedroom and not at her parents' cottage, trying to teach her four year old cousin Carl the backfloat.

What had made her wake up so suddenly, she wondered, but an instant later she knew, and the happy feeling her dream had given her, left her, and suddenly she felt frightened and sad. She could hear her parents' angry voices in the bedroom just beside hers. She could not quite understand what they were saying, but Mom spoke angrily and then she started to cry, and also Dad's voice sounded unhappy and angry.

Lynn buried her head under the blankets and put her fingers in her ears so she would not hear her parents' arguing any longer. But the sad and worried feeling did not leave her. Mom and Dad argued so often lately. Sometimes they did not speak to each other for several days. They would speak to her twin brother Ed and also to Lynn, but not to *each other*. Ed did not even seem to notice. He was happy most of the time, but Lynn could not be fooled and knew that Mom and Dad were just pretending that all was well.

Dad looked so sad sometimes, and even when he was playing with the twins, Lynn could often tell that he was not really happy. And Mom was often gone when the twins came home from school, and sometimes she didn't come home until five o'clock, just in time to make supper. "You are a little worrier, Lynn," Mom would sometimes say playfully to her daughter, when she noticed how easily Lynn became upset. "Come on, girl, smile a little more, be like Ed and don't take life so serious!"

But Lynn could feel that Mom was not really happy. Why didn't Mom and Dad get along? Rita, one of her friends at school, had parents who did not live in the same house anymore. "It's awful!" Rita had once confessed to Lynn. "Mom and Dad are going to have a divorce, so that means that they won't even be married to each other anymore. My sister and I will have to live with Mom, and my two brothers with Dad, but I don't want to live with just one of my parents, I love them both the same!" Then Rita had burst out crying, and Lynn had been at a loss how to comfort her friend. Just imagine, Rita would only see her Dad and her brothers on some weekends, and the whole family would be split in two.

Would that also happen to her family? Lynn started to tremble. Oh, it was too awful to think about. But then she remembered there was something she could do. "Dear Father in heaven", she prayed silently. "Please help Mom and Dad so they will love each other again and please help us so we can stay together as a family. For Jesus sake."

Slowly the awful fear left her and she could start to think about other things again. She had only nine days left to finish her Christmas gift for Mom and Dad. She'd better ask Ed to give her a hand. Otherwise she might not get it finished in time. And it was the nicest gift she had ever made. Slowly Lynn's eyelids became heavier and heavier, and a minute later she was in dreamland.

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"Boy, that's really neat!" exclaimed Ed when he saw Lynn's Christmas gift. "It needs a lot more work, but you still have more than a week. Can't you tell Mom and Dad that it's also my gift, if I want to help you? I did not buy them anything yet."

"Only if you pay half of my expenses", bargained Lynn, and Ed agreed. "That's fair enough". Lynn looked proudly at her masterpiece. Perhaps Mom and Dad would put it in the livingroom every Christmas.

First of all she had painted and decorated a large, cardboard box. The box was already worth looking at. Lynn had cut one side open to make a door. There were Christmas designs on all four sides of the box, holly and bells and snowflakes and churches in the snow.

But inside the box everything was even prettier. Lynn had made a landscape with hills and valleys. She had used paper maché to make the hills, and painted them brown and green. On the hills and in the valleys were tiny figures of sheep, made of modelling clay, and painted white.

She had made a small barn out of cardboard. "That's for the manger", she explained to Ed. "I have to make more cattle, and shepherds, and a star and also a sign with 'Peace on Earth' on it. We could also use some palm trees."

"Yes, and maybe we could build a small fire and group the shepherds around it," suggested Ed. "We could get some pieces of coal, and put them on top of some small stones. And Lynn, what we need is some straw or hay, to make it look more real. We can put it in front of the stable and near the sheep, we won't need more than half a shopping bag."

"Good idea," agreed Lynn. "But where do we get the hay, we can't go to the field behind the house for some dry grass, for everything is covered with snow."

"That wouldn't be the real hay anyway," answered Ed. "No, I have a better idea. I'll go to Mr. Wilson one night after school, I'm sure he will give me some."

"That's quite a walk, it might take you an hour and a half before you get back!" exclaimed Lynn. "Mom will want to know where you are, it's already dark at five, you know. And if I tell her it won't be a surprise anymore."

"Maybe, Mom will go shopping some day and won't be home in time," said Ed. "And if she comes home before I do, you'll just have to think of something. Come on, let's do some more work, let's make some more animals and shepherds." For a few minutes the twins were quietly working with the modelling clay and then Lynn started to giggle.

"Your shepherd looks like Santa Claus. Look at that fat stomach, he'll say: Ho, ho, ho! any minute!" "Look at your donkey, it looks like a horse," Ed answered, a bit peeved, but Lynn corrected him quickly. "That's not a donkey, that's an ox, dummy, can't you see that?"

"No," replied Ed truthfully, and then they both laughed.

"I'll make the sign with Peace on Earth on it and the star, and you'd better make the rest of the animals and the shepherds," Ed suggested. "You were always better with clay anyway."

Half an hour later the sign was finished and it was time for supper.

Carefully Lynn put an old dresser in front of the display, so Mom and Dad would not see it.

"What are you kids doing in the basement?" asked Mom, and Lynn answered quickly, "You'll find out soon enough."

"Are you making a surprise for me?" asked Dad, and Ed replied, "For you and Mom both, it's only one gift, so you'll have to share it."

Neither Mom nor Dad said anything and again Lynn suddenly got a heavy feeling in the pit of her stomach. She could just feel it, her parents were angry with each other again, they weren't talking to each other, just to their children. She tried to think of other things and after supper Ed told her, "Listen, I'm going to get the hay tomorrow right after school. We likely won't get any homework, and then we can do quite a bit of work over the weekend."

The next day Ed and Lynn hurried home, and found a snack waiting for them on the kitchen table. A note from Mom explained, "Went Christmas shopping, I'll be back at 4.30."

"Good," exclaimed Ed. "If I hurry I can be home at five, or a little after five, just before it's completely dark." Lynn got a paper bag for her brother and two minutes later she saw him disappearing around the corner. It was starting to snow again, and the wind was cold, but that did not bother Ed. He wore his warm coat and heavy boots. He enjoyed the long walk to the farm. Especially the last two miles were fun. The country road was almost deserted except for the occasional car that whizzed by, but Ed discovered several animal tracks, probably made by rabbits.

Mr. Wilson gave him as much hay as he wanted and invited him to have a look in the barn. Ed watched the cows being milked and fed, until Mr. Wilson told him, "You'd better go home now, Ed, it's dark at five, you know." Happily Ed munched on the apple Mr. Wilson had given him, as he started to walk home. Nice man, Mr. Wilson. All of a sudden Ed had an idea. Why not pick a few pine cones? Mom could use them to decorate the house. He knew a real nice pine tree, only about twenty yards from the road. It was an old tree, just perfect for climbing, with its long, sturdy branches.

He jumped over the ditch and climbed the hill. Just as he had thought, simply hundreds of pine cones! There were some real nice ones, a little higher up in the tree, but that did not matter, he had not climbed this tree for several months, so it was time he got some practice. Quickly he put the bag with the hay under the tree and a few seconds later he swung his legs over the lower branches. The snowcovered fields and hills looked beautiful from his vantage point, and to have a better view Ed climbed a lot higher. He felt a little awkward in his heavy coat and boots, and quickly he began to pick the pine cones and put them in his pockets. Just as he stretched his arm to pick the last one, he suddenly noticed that his left foot was slipping. Quickly he grabbed a branch with his other arm and tried to regain his balance, but before he realized what had happened his head hit the frozen earth underneath the tree. He felt a sudden, sharp pain, which seemed to cut through his entire body and then everything turned black....

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"It's time for supper, do you want to call Ed?" asked Mom. "Where is he? Come to think of it, I haven't seen him."

Lynn looked up from her book with shining eyes. Boy, this was a good adventure story, she had forgotten everything around her. "Is he still not back? He had to go out for a while," she answered, and then she looked at the clock.

"Good grief, 6 o'clock!" she exclaimed. "He could have been back an hour ago!"

"You mean to say he's out in this weather?" asked Dad. "The snow is really blowing now, did he go to Ron's house?"

Lynn hesitated for a moment, but Mom had already picked up the phone and dialed Ron's number. "He hasn't been at your house at all?" Lynn heard her mother ask, and she knew she would have to explain a few things.

"Ed had to go to Mr. Wilson. He left right after school, we were out at 3.15, and I haven't seen him since", she told her parents.

"Let's phone the Wilson's," said Dad, and Lynn noticed that her parents were a little worried. She went to the backdoor and when she opened it, she knew why her parents felt uneasy. The wind was really howling, and the snow was blowing so much, that she could not even see the street light in front of her house.

"Mr. Wilson told me that Ed left the farm at 4:30, that means he could have been home forty-five minutes ago," said Dad, as he entered the kitchen. "I guess I'll get the car and drive to the farm, maybe I'll meet him." Two minutes later his car pulled out of the driveway. "Let's phone all his friends and the neighbours," suggested Mom. "Maybe he visited somebody." But the phone calls brought no results, and half an hour later Dad came back alone.

"You can hardly see the road, the snow is blowing so badly," Dad said. "I guess we'd better phone the police, it's almost seven o'clock, something must have happened. He's only ten years old, too young to be out in this weather."

Lynn had trouble keeping the tears back. Suppose Ed had had an accident. "The police will be here in five minutes," announced Dad. Then he hesitated for a moment. "Let's all sit down and pray for Ed," he said in a strange voice, and he put his arms around Mom and Lynn. "Lord, we don't know where Ed is, but You do," Dad prayed. "You can make us find him. Please Lord, forgive us the many times we have made you sad, and bring us together again, for Jesus sake."

Lynn's tears flowed freely now, and so did Mom's, but despite all the fear and worries about Ed, Lynn suddenly felt comforted, and warm and safe inside. Dad had put his arm around Mom, and Mom had been sweet to Dad. They weren't angry at each other now!

"It will be very hard to find your boy in this weather, if he's still outside," said the policeman, who arrived a few minutes later. "You can't see any tracks. We'll have it announced over the radio, if we don't find him quickly. And we'd better use our police dogs. Do you have some clothes from your son? The dogs will have to pick up the boy's scent."

"I'm coming with you," Dad said.

Nothing Higher Than Fifty Cents

by Lynne Van Luven

Miss Van Luven is assistant city editor of the Lethbridge Herald, Lethbridge, Alta. This article is used by permission of the Herald.

Fifty cents is all it takes to hire Leo Steynen to repair a leaky faucet, clean a chimney, unplug a drain, or clean up a yard. And the jovial Netherlands-born draftsman doesn't even charge over-time; his price applies to all jobs, whether they take 10 minutes or three hours.

Incredible? That's what Steynen's customers think. They keep wondering, "What's the catch?" and don't believe he will work for just 50 cents.

"Sometimes we get into arguments over the price," he chuckles, "and they insist I take more money. If they do, I have to accept because otherwise it'd hurt their feelings. So I use it to cover the cost of my gasoline." If repairs or replacement of materials are necessary, clients pay Steynen the cost of the items.

However, there actually is a catch. Steynen is a handyman with 'preferred clients' — he works only for senior citizens unable to do odd jobs for themselves who cannot afford the price of a conventional repairman.

For the 33-year-old father of four in Lethbridge, Alberta, the volunteer fixing and tinkering he does for the elderly is nothing more than a private social service gesture. "It's just my little share to help make the world a little better," he says, then apologizes for sounding corny.

He says the venture has been a revelation. "I never realized how many poor people there are. Many of the senior citizens live in little basement suites. One man had only a table, a chair and a bed.

"The smile on the face of an

elderly lady when you've fixed something is payment enough - I like that. But that might sound stupid in this society where people are always working for more dollars."

When Steynen first decided to offer his fix-it service four years ago, he made a poster describing himself as a "happy handyman" and hung it in the Golden Mile Centre. A similar poster still hangs there now, giving his home telephone number.

"I'm available to help any senior citizen - not just those who go to the centre," he says, "but the centre seemed to be the only place I could advertise and reach a lot of pensioners at once."

Steynen now receives more than enough calls to keep him busy. Working evenings and on weekends, he usually goes, tool kit in hand, to a pensioner's home at least twice a week.

"They think he's wonderful; they think he can do anything," says his wife Hannah, who fields the telephone calls.

Indeed, the handyman service is partly a family venture. Sometimes Mrs. Steynen and some of the children accompany him on a call. The couple has twin daughters of nine and two sons, aged six and two years.

"The kids enjoy coming along and it gives them some idea of how others live," says Steynen. "The old people really like to see them, especially if they have no grandchildren of their own. They can spoil them with milk and cookies."

Steynen himself is often plied with tea and baked goods. "A ten-minute job can take four hours," he says. "Senior citizens are often very lonely. Your visit is a highlight, a break in routine. They want you to have a cup of coffee and talk for a while."



Ninety per cent of his clients, he says, are "ladies alone" who always have relied on their husbands for repairs. Steynen says there's a need for other volunteers to work with senior citizens - particularly those

interested in visiting and socializing with them.

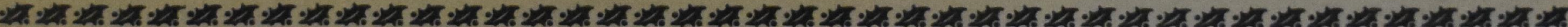
"I feel embarrassed that I can live in such a rich environment while others are so poor," says Steynen. "If I can help out a little, it makes it seem fairer."

Wishing all of you God's blessing for this Christmas season and for the New Year

From the staff of Calvinist Contact:



Anje Buma
Anna deVries
Harry deVries
Keith Knight
Jocelyn Langendoen
Jenny Tigchelaar
Helen VanOostveen



THE GIFT OF PEACE

"Lynn, you stay with Mom."

Lynn had never realized before that a few hours could take so long. Several friends phoned to see if Ed had been found, but it was almost nine o'clock before Dad called.

Mom grabbed the phone and Lynn heard her say, "Oh, thank God, ...how bad is he... yes, we'll take a taxi to the hospital."

"Ed was found unconscious under a tree. He has head injuries and probably some internal bleeding," Mom told Lynn hurriedly. "Let's call a taxi right away." Dad sat in the waiting room and Mom ran to him and so did Lynn. "He's in the operating room right now," said Dad quietly. The doctor said it looked serious. He was covered with snow, we would have never found him without God's help."

The next few hours seemed like a dream, until finally the doctor told them that they had been able to stop the bleeding. "We can't say much more. Why don't you go home and get some sleep," he suggested. "You may come and see him first thing in the morning."

It was a very quiet family that entered the house shortly after midnight.

"Tell me, Lynn," asked Dad sud-

denly. "What did Ed need that hay for? We found a paperbag under the tree, with hay and also several pine cones."

Lynn hesitated for a moment, and then she decided to show her parents the unfinished Christmas gift. What was the use of keeping it secret any longer? Ed was so very sick, he might even die! Carefully she moved the dresser and showed her parents the display and the sign which Ed had made. "Peace on earth" read Mom, and then Lynn started to cry. All of a sudden she had to tell Mom and Dad everything. "You were fighting so much lately," she sobbed. "I was afraid you might get a divorce, just like Rita's parents. Then I thought of Christmas, and of Peace on Earth, and then I got the idea to make this display. Ed promised to help me. Now maybe he'll die."

Dad picked up Lynn in his arms and Mom hugged her. Then Mom said, "Oh, Lynn, you little worrier. I'm so ashamed of myself! I know we were arguing a lot lately. Sometimes that happens between mothers and fathers, and sometimes you even need other people to help you sort out your problems. But, Lynn, don't ever worry about that again!"

Dad added, "Lynn, tonight I realized how much I love Mom and my

children, and how much God has given me. Maybe God is using Ed's accident to make us see what we were doing to each other and to our children. Lynn, Mom and Dad will pray about it. And don't forget, Ed is in God's hand, God loves him more than we do."

A few minutes later Lynn snuggled under her blankets. It was so safe in her bed and two seconds later she had fallen into a deep, dreamless sleep.

The next few days were difficult ones, for Ed remained in serious condition. Just before the Christmas holiday started, Mom picked Lynn up from school. "Ed is improving", she said happily. "In a few days you may come and see him. He's out of danger."

Lynn felt happy tears coming to her eyes. "Oh, thank you God", she prayed silently. All of a sudden she had an idea. "I'd like to finish the Christmas gift, and give it to Ed," she told Mom. "May I take it to the hospital?"

"Of course," Mom said and for the next few days Lynn worked very hard. Finally, on the day before Christmas, Dad, Mom and Lynn got into the car to go to the hospital. In the trunk was Lynn's gift, and she was so excited she could barely sit still. Dad entered his

son's room first, and behind him came Lynn and her mother, carefully carrying the cardboard box.

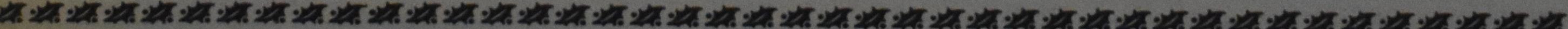
"Hi," came Ed's voice from the bed, and Mom and Lynn lowered the gift on his bed. For a moment brother and sister looked at each other, not knowing what to say, and then Ed looked at the present and started to grin.

"Your ox still looks like a horse," he teased Lynn, and Lynn felt so relieved she felt like dancing. Her brother looked funny with his head all bandaged up, and his face looked pale, but he would be alright!

"Peace on earth", read Ed. "I did a pretty good job, didn't I, but so did you. Look, you didn't even forget the hay!"

Dad pulled a few chairs close to Ed's bed. "Sit down, Mom and Lynn," he said gently. "I like to thank God that He spared Ed's life, and brought us closer together as a family. I'm sure none of us will ever forget this Christmas. God gave His Son, to bring peace in our hearts, peace with God, and peace with each other."

Mom had tears in her eyes, but Lynn knew they were tears of happiness. And again, during Dad's prayer, she felt warm and secure and safe, and so very, very thankful.





Halleluiah (Tune Ps.H. no. 308)

Halleluia, bless the Lord!
Heavens high, His praise record!
Halleluia, laud Him, earth,
For the blessed Messiah's birth!
God has found in man His pleasure
Peace on earth, the Saviour came.
All ye nations, spread His fame.
God is gracious without measure.

Halleluia, Jesus Christ!
Be His name evangelized.
Halleluia, never cease
Anthems for the Prince of Peace.
Sing with shepherds and with sages!
Worship Christ, the Son on Man,
God before the world began,
Child and Father of the ages.

Glory be to God on high;
Glorify Him, magnify!
Glory to the Father sing;
Glorify the Son, our King;
Glory to the Holy Spirit!
Glorify our covenant Lord;
Glor to his Son adored;
Glorify His work, revere it!

K. Hart
1906-1977

Best wishes for a blessed Christmas and a prosperous New Year from the management and staff of

Hollandia Bakeries Ltd.

and

Archway Cookies